

## **ABSTRACT**

Nichole R. Lewis, HERSTORY: EXPLORATION OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN WHO WERE FIRST TO LEAD AN HBCU 1994 to 2014 (Under the direction of Dr. Crystal Chambers). Department of Educational Leadership, March 2017.

There is increasing scrutiny and accountability being placed on colleges and university in American higher education. Historically black colleges and universities are not exempt from that scrutiny, and in some regards may face it with a higher degree of risk. The criticism and questions of necessity, validity and stability of HBCUs does not come without serious consideration of those who are selected to lead these institutions. This study explores the lived experiences of black women who were selected as the first women to lead three HBCUs between 1994 and 2014. This time-bound period was selected as there was a significant increase in the selection of women to serve as presidents of colleges and university, with HBCUs and community colleges experiencing the highest increases, as the governing boards of those institutions were selecting black women to take the helm. This qualitative study uses narrative inquiry to specifically explore the transition period into the presidency, the first 100 days in the role and the final 100 days in the position as permanent HBCU president or chancellor. Considering the conceptual theory of the Glass Cliff, findings are used to draw meaning from the experiences of these women, that may serve as guidance for African-American women who are considering a career path that ends in the presidential suite. The narratives explored in this study are the stories of Dr. T.J. Bryan – Fayetteville State University, Dr. Dianne Boardley Suber – Saint Augustine’s University, and Dr. Dorothy Cowser Yancy – Johnson C. Smith University, all located in the state of North Carolina.



HERSTORY:  
EXPLORATION OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN WHO  
WERE FIRST TO LEAD AN HBCU  
1994 to 2014

A Dissertation  
Presented to  
The Faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership  
East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by  
Nichole R. Lewis  
March, 2017

©Copyright 2017  
Nichole R. Lewis

HERSTORY:  
EXPLORATION OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN WHO  
WERE FIRST TO LEAD AN HBCU  
1994 to 2014

by  
Nichole R. Lewis

APPROVED BY:

DIRECTOR OF DISSERTATION: \_\_\_\_\_  
Crystal Chambers, PhD

COMMITTEE MEMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
Grant Hayes, PhD

COMMITTEE MEMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
Maxine B. Mimms, PhD

COMMITTEE MEMBER: \_\_\_\_\_  
Maria Clay, PhD

CHAIR OF THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP:

\_\_\_\_\_  
William Rouse, Jr., EdD

DEAN OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Paul Gemperline, PhD

## DEDICATION

Almost every year of my doctoral studies, I lost someone of great significance in my life including strong, confident black men (my uncle John Henry Lewis, my paternal grandfather James “Jack” Lewis, and my uncle James Henry Lewis) who never themselves ever even went to college but who raised and championed daughters, and in their own way contributed to raising and championing me, to pursue my path, to live life, to know my worth, strength and intelligence. Just before I defended my dissertation proposal, I lost my 92-year old maternal grandmother, retired college professor Barbara Baker Boardley, whose approach to life’s tough times was intuitively to “take a hot bath and lay down across the bed”.

And as I was preparing to conduct my last interview, I lost a guiding light in Dr. Debra Saunders White- the first woman chancellor of North Carolina Central University. She fought cancer as she lived and lead-with zeal, vigor and a quick step that would *make* a way.

I dedicate this to those whose transitions reminded me from wince I come; and to my 9-year old daughter Taylor Marie – so that she’ll know when you keep pushing – you can finish on top!

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This was a journey I continually say to people I did not chose for myself. It could not have happened without constant support. I have to thank my mother who was “Mama” when I needed her to be and DBS when she knew she had to be. In the midst of her own life changes, she kept me moving, provided her resources, her experiences and her circle to literally make this all possible. She reminded me I could be a scholar, and a mommy all at the same time. To Taylor who was in this place with me, who was often on auto-pilot for full weekends, but at the end was checking for feedback and celebrating right alongside me. – love you best. I am so lucky to be “this chic’s” mommy. I have to acknowledge my sister and Taylor’s pre-K-teacher-turned babysitter who have my co-parents in this journey for the past 5 years, without their unmovng support, both she and I may have lost our wits.

Thank you to my classmate-turned-coworker, and soror who moved through this with me. It’s something special to have a person who can celebrate with you as she is striving to reach the goal herself. I thank my besties who were already finished their journey and let me “be absent”.

Special thank you to the members of my committee, Dr. Grant Hayes, and Dr. Maria Clay; to Dr. Maxine B. Mimms who saw something in me as a teenager when she made me memorize and recite a poem of Maya Angelou to prove she was my favorite poet before she would give me one of Dr. Angelou’s early books of poetry. I want to yell thank you to Dr. Crystal Chambers, my committee chair, who encouraged me and let me be candid and acknowledged that we could get to “done” even with life happening.

And I thank GOD who helped me see a glimpse of some things, delayed others and removed the rest only for a time, only to reveal, as I came to the conclusion of this part of the journey, that He plans to give it all back – more abundantly.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
TITLE.....	i
COPYRIGHT.....	ii
SIGNATURE.....	iii
DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION.....	1
The Problem.....	3
Definition of Terms.....	5
Summary.....	6
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE.....	8
Success Described for Black Males versus Black Females.....	8
Historical Context.....	15
Pathways to and Challenges of the University Presidency.....	17
Leading as a Black Woman.....	27
Theoretical Considerations: The Dilemma of Being Black and Female.....	31
Conceptual Framework - Glass Cliff.....	33
Summary.....	39
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY.....	41
Overview and Purpose of the Study.....	41
Participant Selection Process.....	43
Research Design.....	47



Delimitations.....	49
Trustworthiness.....	50
Summary.....	52
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS.....	54
Dr. Thelma Jane (T. J.) Bryan: First Woman Chancellor of Fayetteville State University.....	55
What She Walked Into – A School in Crisis.....	56
The Transitional Period.....	60
First 100 Days.....	64
The Last 100 Days.....	70
Pivotal Moments.....	77
Dr. Dianne Boardley Suber: First Woman President of Saint Augustine’s University (SAU).....	80
What She Walked Into – A School in Crisis.....	81
The Transitional Period.....	84
First 100 Days.....	87
The Last 100 Days.....	93
Pivotal Moments.....	102
Dr. Dorothy Cowser Yancy: First Woman President of Johnson C. Smith University (JCSU).....	106
What She Walked Into – A School in Crisis.....	107
The Transitional Period.....	109
First 100 Days.....	111
The Last 100 Days.....	116
Pivotal Moments.....	119

Cross-Case Analysis.....	122
Transition Period Comparisons.....	123
Relationship with Board of Trustees.....	123
Leading as a Black Woman.....	126
The Bryan Experience.....	127
The Suber Experience.....	128
The Yancy Experience.....	129
Lesser Visibility.....	133
Lessons Learned.....	135
Staying Too Long.....	143
Summary.....	145
CHAPTER 5: THE CONCLUSION.....	147
Reframing the Literature.....	149
The Calling.....	149
Pathways to and Challenges of the College Presidency.....	151
Black Men and Sister Presidents.....	153
Emerging Themes – Discovery, Media and Culture.....	154
Discovery – The Not Knowing.....	154
Phenome of Influence of Media.....	155
Significance of Prevailing Climate.....	156
The Glass Cliff.....	157
Conclusion.....	161
Limitations.....	164

Implications for Future Research.....	166
REFERENCES.....	168
APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER.....	182
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM.....	183
APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL.....	186

## **CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

If there is one word that is used throughout the news media, scholarly journal articles and in conversations amongst higher educational professionals to describe the current state of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs), it is “crisis.” From blogs to editorial pieces by newly minted HBCU college presidents, the schools created to serve formerly enslaved Americans continue to be faced with challenges not unlike those encountered during their inception (Brown & Freeman, 2004; Reynolds, 2006). HBCUs are not being held to any higher accountability than that of other American colleges and universities. However, the missions of these institutions’ connection to the population they were established to and continue to serve make HBCUs more vulnerable than other institutions. The increased national focus on graduation outcomes, financial stability, academic achievement, and sustainability put these institutions especially at risk (Stuart, 2012; Reynolds, 2006). In recent years, the proposed and debatable purpose of HBCUs is to continue to provide a quality education to minorities who otherwise may not be able to compete for admissions into predominantly white institutions.

Crises notwithstanding, HBCUs continue to positively contribute to the higher education landscape. Historically black colleges and universities are credited with varying degrees of percentage points of representing approximately 3% of all institutions of higher education but educate 14% of black undergraduates, and awarding roughly 24% of bachelor, graduate and professional degrees each year to African-Americans (Esters & Strayhorn, 2013; Nettles & Perna, 1997) in comparison to traditionally white institution. HBCUs are credited for successfully graduating black students classified as “at-risk” (Gasman & Kimbrough, 2010; Gasman & Commodore, 2014; Lomax, 2015). HBCUs are even credited with being the foundation for the successful completion of PhDs for blacks, particularly in the science and

engineering fields as 73% of black women and 57% of black men holding PhDs in the sciences completed their undergraduate degrees at an HBCU (Strayhorn, Williams, Tillman-Kelly, & Suddeth, 2013). HBCUs continue to be included and discussed in political circles. In a symposium held in 2010, and during a 2015 commencement address, at North Carolina Central University, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, touted HBCUs for their contribution to the political and financial landscape of the country, but he also acknowledged the consistent battle HBCUs have to do more with less (Gasman & Commodore, 2014; Weathers, 2015).

These institutions' continued viability, in spite of the odds, can in part be attributed to leadership. Schools like Tuskegee, and Hampton University, Xavier, Spelman, and Morehouse Colleges, all had leadership that made significant shifts to remain viable and relevant during the late 1990s and early 2000s (Allen & Jewell, 2002). Hampton University, under the 38-year leadership of Dr. William Harvey, Morehouse College and Xavier University, under the 40-year and 46-year leadership of Dr. Benjamin Mays and Dr. Norman Francis respectively, and Howard University, all have stories involving the dynamic leadership of its presidents. Each president in his own way provided a level of continuity and stability that comes with leading an institution through multiple decades against an ever changing landscape of industry and politics. What is missing from the narrative, are the accomplishments of a number of women who also led, providing growth and stability to HBCUs over the past three decades.

In 1990, 133 higher education institutions, [both predominantly white and historically black] were led by African Americans, but only 18 were led by women. In 1998, 38 black women were college presidents (Bower & Wolverton, 2009). While the numbers appear to grow, the tenure of these women varied greatly, in tandem with the shift in the tenure of sitting HBCU presidents. According to a United Negro College Fund report, Myrick-Harris (2014), indicated

the average HBCU presidential term is [now closer to] 10 years, yet in a 2012 article, then-Philander Smith College president Walter Kimbrough stated some stints as short as three. How do these two pieces of information fit together? They fit because in 2012, of the 105 operating HBCUs, 16, or 15.2%, had openings at the helm; that number remained in the double-digits in 2014 (Gasman, 2012; Stewart, 2013). The models for growth and sustainability have been at universities with male presidents who have served for over 20 years and been able to pull from their own past and reinvent or re-tweak the wheel. Board of trustees, governors and rectors are challenged in finding presidential candidates that are able or willing to commit to a role plagued with such financial obstacles and pressure from constituents who should be advocates and supporters, who can stay long enough to make a lasting impact on such an institution. There has been much discussion in popular literature about the ability of boards of trustees to make sound decisions about what makes a good HBCU president. Board presidential hiring decisions in the late 1990s and early 2000s began what appeared to be a trend of leadership shift, particularly at schools that seemed to be struggling more than others, toward female leaders. Given that some have dubbed the leadership as a strong component in the crisis of HBCU administration, it stands to reason that further exploration of women's leadership, specifically African American women's leadership of HBCUs is warranted.

### **The Problem**

Why is the growing percentage of HBCU presidential vacancies and the selection for those positions a dilemma in today's higher education arena? According to a study reported by the American Council of Education on the institutional capacity, of 149 colleges, nationally, 58% of college presidents in 2013 were 61 years old or older and nearing retirement (Titterton, 2013). The question has been raised as to whether the makeup of the boards of trustees creates a

formula of a sound selection process, and whether members are equipped to assess the potential of a successful candidate. Among the reasons given by both U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, and John S. Wilson, executive director of the White House Initiative on Historically Black Colleges and Universities were the “the abnormally high vacancies are part of a problem that has been simmering for years, with an uphill battle in attracting quality leaders, but the immediate issue is the state of the economy” (Duncan, 2010, para. 3-5). The goal of boards of trustees is to not only fill the open vacancies with presidents that will keep the doors of HBCUs open, but to fill them with qualified candidates, willing to move in to a role that requires them to sell the continued, or build a revised, mission to a skeptical public. There is a need for HBCU leadership to make intentional connections with the young college goer of today, and what resonates is the need for a significant shift in the idea of what a college president looks like and should be to an institution. One of those shifts in the “look” of the presidency is that of gender.

Much of the literature related to historically black colleges and universities or African-Americans in higher education looks at the retention and persistence rates of black students, and faculty. Other research is focused on the constraints or circumstances by which blacks ascend to the role of president or chancellor at predominantly White institutions. There are studies that focus on the broader spectrum of African-Americans faculty and leadership under the auspices of people or women of color in the academy (Holmes, 2004; Jackson, 2004; Sotello Viernes Turner, 2007). Yet few studies focus on the African-American female leadership of HBCUs.

Holmes (2004) examined the experiences of African-American presidents at public and private institutions; however the study does not reveal the institution type or differentiate in great detail the varying experiences between male presidents versus female presidents. As part of setting the background, Holmes (2004) posited that because of the mechanisms colleges and

universities established within institutions to circumvent or curtail affirmative action regulations and mandates, that “in some ways affirmative action became another tool to maintain and perpetuate racism and sexism in higher education” (p. 24). Even less has been researched about the experience of black female presidents who were the first female to lead a historically black institution. And there are yet fewer that consider the experiences of those women chosen to lead what may be considered struggling HBCUs. Gasman (2007) would attribute this to the greater omission of black women’s roles at black colleges overall.

### **Definition of Terms**

*Black* – Denotes race based on being a descendent of African people throughout the diaspora. While Black and African-American are not interchangeable, they are used interchangeably in this study as a matter of common parlance.

*Board of Governors* – Governing body of an institution or regulatory agency, selected and appointed usually by a government. In some states, public or “state” institutions are held accountable to a board of governors in addition to a Board of Trustees of a specific institution.

*Board of Trustees* – This is the body of individuals who serve as the hiring, evaluating and supervisory team to the president or chancellor. For the purpose of this study governing board, or the Board may be used inter-changeably as a reference to the Board of Trustees

*Female* – Understanding gender is a fluid concept, for purpose of this study female is a cisgender and a woman; woman will be used interchangeably in this study with female

*First* – As it relates to defining the place in the university’s history of presidents, “first” shall refer to being appointed or selected to serve officially and permanently in the role; having been preceded by no other meeting the same criteria

*Glass Cliff* – The conceptual theory that women are more likely than men to be placed



(promoted and given appearance of breaking a gender barrier) in risky leadership positions, or to head organizations associated with poor performance.

*President or Chancellor* – The campus-level chief executive officer of the institution; highest ranking campus official. For simplicity “president” will be used throughout the study, except for instances of direct quotes where “chancellor” is the official title referencing the highest-ranking campus official being discussed.

*School in Crisis* – Disadvantaged or negatively impacted by national economic conditions and policies; low or limited revenue streams, lower operating budgets/facing financial and funding stability; less alumni giving; declining or fluctuating enrollment, challenged with outdated physical or technological resources/decreasing or rapidly depreciating infrastructure (Avery, 2009; Breneman, 1994).

### **Summary**

The August 2014 issue of HBCU Digest noted the recent shift in the male-dominated leadership of HBCUs with the appointment of female presidents at 10 colleges including North Carolina Central University, Florida A and M University, Florida Memorial University, Morehouse School of Medicine, Talladega College, Alabama State University and University of Maryland Eastern Shore. In 9 of these 10 permanent positions, the female selected was the first female to ever serve in the permanent position as president (or chancellor) (Jackson, 2014; Stewart, 2014). Though Jackson focuses on the three-year span from 2011 through 2014, increasingly women have been selected to lead HBCUs since the late 1990s, at schools where they would serve as the first female to lead an institution existence for over 100 years. This raises the question as to what has been the unique experiences of being the first woman to lead a historically black institution at a time when the mere category of the institution places it in crisis.

Why do these women believe they were selected by governance boards to stabilize and redirect these institutions when they are in turmoil? In what ways, if any do their experiences during transition lend evidence of breaking a glass ceiling, or more similar to the emerging concept of the glass cliff? What commonalities, if any, exist in the experiences of these women?

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of black women who served as the first female president of a historically black college or university between 1994 and 2014. Governing boards were beginning to select women to lead HBCUs increasingly during that time period, and those women seemed to be selected to lead schools that were in crisis. Among these women are those selected to lead: Fayetteville State University (Bryan), Johnson C. Smith University (Yancy) and Saint Augustine's University (Suber). Through the narratives of these women, those who aspire to the presidency of an HBCU will be able to gain insight into what that experience may bring. These stories stand to shed light not just on how to get there, but provide insight on staying and "staying too long" (Suber, personal communication, April 2014; Sias, personal communication, February 2014). Through the exploration of these experiences, boards of trustees will be able to draw from their role in the periods of transition for new presidents. By referencing this study, women who are currently in senior leadership roles may be better equipped to plan for their own transition into, and possibly out of the role as the chief campus-level executive at an institution with a history of challenges, but also a history of impact.

## **CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

The following is a review of the literature related to the leadership of historically black colleges, both from a historical perspective through current day. The literature allows for establishment of foundation and framework by which the narrative of the selected female presidents may be interpreted and better understood. Herein, I attempt to make connections between previous studies but to also highlight missed opportunities to explore the unique experiences of women who served as the first African-American females to lead historically black colleges during a time when the face of college presidencies in American was beginning to shift. I will review studies that introduce the conceptual framework of the glass cliff, and position that concept as a potential lens through which to view the feedback collected during the study. Finally in this chapter, I will review studies that may help narrow the focus of the narratives, considering how critical the transitions and milestones of a presidency are, particularly at an institution that is considered to be in crisis.

### **Success Described for Black Males versus Black Females**

Success is often defined based on one's perception of their personal trajectory from a relative starting point to one's current status at the point of assessment. Merriam-Webster defines success as "the fact of getting wealth, respect or fame; alternately achieving the correct or desired result of an attempt." Therefore, to make a comparison or to attempt to describe the nuances, differences, or the varying success of Black men in American against that of Black women, may to be to consider what is deemed as the "correct" result of an attempt. One must also consider if success is the result of an attempt or an amalgamation of attempts. Does this paradox of success look different based on gender and society's expectations? Is

success mitigated by the starting point of a person's attempt? How is wealth, respect and fame actualized among an ethnic group that have similarly situated marginalized beginnings?

The following research is relevant to the consideration the contributing factors of success, which may lead to a more focused analysis of the likelihood of women versus men in leading struggling HBCUs to a place of success. Bond (2011) considers Dr. Julianne Malveaux's concept of the paradox of success for Black females in at HBCUs using Malveaux's book *"Shouldering the Third Burden: The Status of African-American Women"*. The article and the associated study look specifically at the experience of Black female students at an HBCU, however there is some transference that can be considered in the way in which the concept is described. In Malveaux's (2009) book, she describes a third burden, beyond being Black and female, which is that of class. More specifically Bond, quoting Malveaux (2009), posits "that the intersection of race and gender, additionally create a third burden for African-American women in that part of our status is a function of the way that majority society marginalized and demonizes African American men" (cited in Bond, 2011, p. 133). This supports the idea that for black women there may be a push-and-pull to be either one or the other. In her review of existing literature, Bond considers data that suggests black female success in the boardroom and classroom has come at the expense of black men. It may be then argued that as black women continue to appear to outperform black males it "renders [black women] less visible as administrators" as they operate on a college campus in a system often viewed through a patriarchal lens (Bond, 2011, p. 137). The transferability of this concept is also explored in this study from the perspective of the impact on black female college students and their experience, along with the black male experience related to college programming. Bond contends that as

HBCUs are challenged with diminishing resources, the focus of some institutions begins to shift and leaders must then prioritize how existing resources will be allocated.

Kaba (2005) conducted a study comparing the status of Black women and Black men in America. In his article, Kaba makes the argument that there has been a gradual shift in power and economic influence trending upward for Black women. The article sets as a base of comparison the status of Black men and women in politics, economics (business) and education. Of note Kaba (2005) acknowledges a number of observations related to the imbalance between these two groups during the time frame under consideration.

An important development ... in the United States is that although black males as of 2003 are still in more leadership positions within the black population, black females are on the verge of overtaking black males in leadership positions in a variety of important sectors. (Kaba, 2005, p. 33)

Relative to black college presidents, Kaba (2005) observes this:

...in the September 2001 issue of Ebony, the names and pictures of 79 black college presidents were listed, entitled "Black College Presidents: Pioneering on the Frontiers of Education." Of the 79 black college presidents, only 20% were females. Many of the men whose pictures were shown on this list were older black males, most of whom would retire soon. Their replacements will most likely be mostly black females because compared to black males they will be more likely to have the academic credentials required to become future black college presidents. (p. 35)

Although in his book, Kitwana (2002), is detailing the socio-political shifts in black culture as influenced by the hip-hop generation, his research focuses on the impact of the gains of black women in the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s. He suggests that with the gains of Black

women, there is research that suggests that black men resent their female counterparts, seeing their gains as bringing to light the inadequacies of men. Kitwana (2002) posits that some black men perceive that Black women are surpassing them in some fields because they have the benefit of not being seen as black. This seems disjointed as Kaba (2005) throughout his article notes supporting information regarding the increasing gap between the influence and accomplishments of black women compared to black men. He concludes that the shift is occurring gradually, and makes the prediction that by the 2010 census the gaps will be more noticeable.

Cole and Guy-Sheftall (2009) consider multiple intersections and impact related to being black and female in America. In their introductory, Guy-Sheftall recounts a letter to an editor from an African-American male in which the author suggests that Black men and women can certainly come to resolution on a discourse of race and gender “behind closed doors”, without the validation of White people. The authors posit that very statement as a reality of challenges Black women face when they are in positions to be vocal and lead, or push against social norms in the community. The authors challenge that Black women often must contend with the persona of being an angry Black woman when they are addressing issues within a certain community, especially if to do so, would lead to the possibility of criticism of a, or a group of, Black men. Cole and Guy-Sheftall (2009) facilitated a multilogue between Black men and women of note in the American political, educational, and literary scene. Their text covers a myriad of topics under the auspices of the title *The Struggle for Women’s Equality in African American Communities*, but of note for this study are a few realizations that may aid in the understanding of the role of gender in the slow rise of women in university leadership in the HBCU setting. One in particular is this:

In the [stories of the Black men about their life education towards race and gender] we found eventual willingness to accept a status that for many is very difficult to face: the role of oppressor. Many...we interviewed...came of age during the civil rights movement and made personal commitments to the fight against racial oppression...They so completely identified the image of the oppressor with the white male that the image of themselves as potential oppressors of Black women was an unrecognizable one (p.44).

As it relates to this study, Cole and Guy-Sheftall is helpful in putting black feminism into context the realization of the role of gender, and how Black women and men interpret their own contributions to American and Black American society. It also provides a contextual reference to ways in which Black men who have had influence have decidedly, but often unknowingly, impacted the lack of progression of women as a result of how they were socialized at an early age.

Providing the perspective of a black woman, in her chapter entitled The Integrity of Black Womanhood, hooks (1995) suggests these notions of black women advancing in various industries are an outcome of conditioning of white racism, and part and parcel to an ongoing effort to devalue the accomplishments and contributions of black women as a standalone experience. Often white racists are joined in [the devaluation of black womanhood] by sexist black male peers who continue to act as though all efforts on the part of black women to assert liberator agency in our lives are really attacks on black manhood, acts of betrayal that are meant to keep the black male down...Black women's roles in struggles for black liberation have always been, and continue to be, subordinate to those of black males. Sexist black males (and their female allies) want to keep it that way (Hooks, 1995, pp. 80-81). Cole (1993), the first

black women to serve as president of Spelman College, writes about sexism, racism and oppression in her book *Conversations*. In her chapter on being black and female she says this:

Not every woman's "adventure" with sexism has been the same. There have always been enlightened men and oppression-tolerant women...economics has [also] played a role in the tone and timbre of the oppressions a woman experiences...When sexism is then superimposed not only on poverty but on racism...if African Americans are less than Whites and women are less than men, then African American women are least of all – least of all even among their sisters of color...[So] when [black women] find themselves confronted by racism...and sexism, they [in fact] find themselves between a rock and a hard place. (pp. 85-86)

Cole (1993) discusses how society would attempt to make sexism and racism parallel challenges and calls into question or rather points out that often times the most devastating battles a black women experiences come through her involvement with Black men. She goes on to describe that the nature of sexism is that men and women are equal as human beings. What is telling is that she uses balanced examples of that proposed equality. Often in the articles on feminism an author will posit examples of how women are the level equal with men on tasks or areas thought traditionally male-dominated, and are written in a way that permeates the perception that females desire to be considered equal void of the recognition of gender differences. However, she gives examples that suggest feminism would support the idea that though men do not give birth to children they are fully capable of caring for them because "genetically" there is not an innate difference in the ability to love and care for an offspring. Cole speaks specifically to the idea that feminism challenges the assumption about the capability of women to lead a college. "Women should have decision-making power...for



complex...problems. [There is nothing that suggests that schools like] Lincoln University, the Universities of Chicago or Wisconsin, Spelman or any organization would run amuck just because a woman was at the helm” (Cole, 1993, p. 87). Throughout the chapter Cole offers several examples from her own experiences during her tenure as the president of Spelman College that lend to the narrative of the personal experience of being female in leadership and then the additional story of being the first black female at a HBCU.

Bower and Wolverton (2009) discussed in greater detail below, consider Six C’s of leadership, one being that of a sense of calling. In her chapter *She Who Learns Must Teach*, Cole talks about the responsibility and necessity of African Americans getting an education that is far more than the need for basic literacy. She suggests it is the responsibility of the black women to ensure an environment of long-term learning, and that long-term learning is a key role for HBCUs. Though not directly stated, her reflections suggest that it was a unique experience as a Black woman leading an HBCU in terms of shaping for students “an education that does not just teach [black youth] about the world but also prepares [those students] to live purposefully in it” (Bower & Wolverton, 2009, p. 170). Finally, of relevance to this study, Cole opens *Conversations* with an autobiographical snapshot of her family background, and the family system in which she developed many of her early concepts about herself and her abilities. As one of the more notable Black women presidents of an HBCU (though not the first woman to lead said institution), that narrative will provide an additional layer of comparison of the narratives that will be collected herein.

As we consider the experiences of black female presidents, the ideology expressed by these researchers and authors will add the analysis. The aforementioned literature may serve

particularly helpful in interpreting the narratives as it relates to the transition into roles that were previously only held by men.

### **Historical Context**

The formation of historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) is rooted in the desire of blacks to gain an education during a time of legalized racial segregation and following a time when it was against the law for blacks to have a formal or informal education (Anderson, 1988; Brown & Freeman, 2004). Though some were supported by philanthropists, many were founded and funded by religious groups, and lead by members of the clergy of those institutions, former officers in the military or the educated who thought is a noble cause to educate freedmen and formerly enslaved Negros. Very few were seen as viable, model institutions that would be considered competitors of better established, well-endowed colleges that served the rest of America (Anderson, 1988; Brown & Freeman, 2004; Thelin, 2004). Dual systems of higher education within the southern and border states suppressed the advancement of historically black institutions, as well as the educational opportunities of black Americans (Thompson, 1998). In spite of the odds, Anderson highlights the many ways in which blacks persisted in their struggle to develop an educational system that was in line with their own needs and desires (Anderson, 1988).

Notably, there have been historically black colleges that have been regarded as icons and pioneers in higher education since their inception. Wilberforce University (founded 1856) holds the honor of being the oldest private Black college established before the Civil War and the resulting abolition of slavery in America. Lincoln University (PA), chartered as the Ashmun Institute in 1854, which is the alma mater of Langston Hughes, Kwame Nkrumah, and Thurgood Marshall and displays on its campus the immortalized image and words of Frederick

Douglas, who may arguably be the most recognized name among black abolitionists, boasts the legacy of being the first-degree granting institution for males of African descent in the sciences. Of particular fame was Hampton (Normal School and Institute) University (founded 1868), which was founded by the Methodists and first lead by General Samuel Armstrong which developed a model that gained traction, notoriety and financial support from northern philanthropists, for providing blacks industrial education (Fairfax, 2005; Unknown, n.d.; Thelin, 2004). That model was then used by one of Hampton's most recognized graduates Booker T. Washington who founded Tuskegee (Institute) University in Alabama. Booker T. Washington became one of the foremost voices on the education of blacks, and Tuskegee became a symbol of the success and relevance of industrial education, hence garnering the model the nomenclature often referred to as the "Hampton-Tuskegee" model (Fairfax, 2005; Thelin, 2004). Fisk University (founded 1865) posed a different opportunity for education, focusing on a true liberal arts curriculum and later was considered the alma mater of several black thought leaders including, W.E.B. Dubious, whose ideas on the path or sustainability for blacks in America, were often compared and contrasted with those of Booker T. Washington (Anderson, 1988). Bethune-Cookman (Daytona Cookman Institute) is considered the only HBCU founded by a Black woman for Black girls; and yet Spelman holds the credit for being the first, continuously all-women's college founded for the purpose of educating black women (Watson & Gregory, 2005). There is much to be learned from the contributions of these institutions, and about sustainability through crisis and change, just from exploring the legacy historically black colleges.

The history of HBCUs is important as one considers the description of institutions being in crisis, and attempts to develop a comparison of practices and strategies of the institutions'

leaders. Equally as important to consider as part of a historical context, is the preparedness of the traditional leadership pool for HBCUs –black men and black women.

### **Pathways To and Challenges of the University Presidency**

In order to consider the challenges to and experiences of the university presidency in America, one must consider what the university president make-up is in the country. Considering the period of consideration for this study, it is important to have a snapshot of the average college president at the time. The American Council of Education conducted a study on the profile of the American college presidency and the potential shifts over a 25-year period. Cook (2012) reviews the comparative study which looked at the demographics, duties, and selection process for the college presidency in the United States between 1986 and 2011. The study showed the age of college presidents had increased from an average of 52 years old to 61, with 54% of college presidents surveyed reporting they were in their second presidency. The study showed with shifts in the challenges facing colleges, governing boards were looking for leadership with more experience in educational leadership. The ACE survey confirms with the racial and ethnic landscape of the student populations between 1990 and 2009 increased significantly (14%), that same racial and ethnic profile for the presidency did not (only 5%). However, what the study revealed was that while there was little increase in the people of color in the presidency, there was an increase in gender representation in the role of the presidency, and that those shifts upward were most apparent in associate degree granting institutions. Cook offers this possible explanation:

In 1986 just 10% of college presidents were women. Today, 26% of institutional leaders are female. Twenty-five years ago bachelor's institutions had the greatest share of female presidents. This is not surprising given that most all-female postsecondary institutions

were bachelor's institutions. However in 2011, associate colleges had the largest share of women leaders. One reason for this shift is likely the closing of a large number of all female institutions over the past two decades (Titterton, 2013).

Cook (2012) indicates that the career path of college presidents was basically unchanged, citing that the overwhelming majority of respondents indicate the last held position prior to their first stint as president was of a chief academic officer or the provost as the traditional training position for presidencies. In fact, according to Cook (2012) another consistent trend over the two-decade period was most, yet not all, college presidents had spent their entire careers in higher education. While the 2011 study indicated marginal shifts in the career profile of presidents, with most have spent the majority of their career in higher education, there has been a shift upward of those presidents (selected between 2006-2011) who had longer-career experiences outside of the academy, primarily in private sector institutions both nonprofit and for profit. Cook (2012) presented a hopeful outlook on the potential for increases in the number of women who are positioned to take the most senior leadership position at a university, considering over 40% of current chief academic officers are female, and the overwhelming number of pending university presidential retirements.

Sotello Viernes Turner (2007) conducted a cross-case comparison of the pathways to the presidency for three women of color. She conducted in-depth interviews with the first Mexican-American, Asian-American and Native American females to serve as college presidents in the United States. In her study she recorded and compared both their perception of race and ethnicity in their career journeys. Like similar studies reviewed herein, she looked at the historical context of exclusion of women from the education system and what she calls the "invisibility" of women of color in the college presidency. When researching Mexican/Latinas/Hispanas in higher

education leadership, Sotello Viernes Turner (2007) shares that “scholars writing about the experience of Latinas in university leadership note the challenge of racial, ethnic, and gender stereotyping, but concentrate...their discussion on cultural differences leading to the feelings of dissonance and contradiction in the workplace” (p. 5). The commonalities among these women were early success in their careers, a childhood that helped to blur some of the gender-role lines, their uniqueness to build a vision by anticipating the future and their non-traditional leadership styles in what were considered diverse communities. Quoting directly from the interviews, Sotello Viernes Turner (2007) indicates words and phrases to highlight non-traditional style as “participatory, team-building, facilitator, and matchmaker...these women value working with people” (p. 18).

Jones (2013) explores the phenomena of the African-American females’ career path, challenges, and barriers to the presidency, using Black feminist theory as a conceptual framework. Pulling from multiple sources, Jones reports on the statistics of African-American women in university leadership positions. While the percentages increased in the mid-2000s to 23%, up from the 2% mark in the 1990s, the data she reviewed suggested the acquisition of the presidency was still very limited to the type of institution where these women served. These institutions were primarily minority-serving schools, historically Black schools or tribal colleges. (Cook & Cordova, 2007). In 2012, the number climbed to 26%, but the African American women presidents remain underrepresented (Cook, 2012). As part of the delimitations and universality of Jones’ (2013) study is a distinction between the experiences of black female presidents at historically black colleges and those at predominantly white institutions. Nor does Jones capture the in-depth experience of Black women leading Black colleges and universities, which are culturally considered to be in a consistent state of crisis.

What is left to be uniquely explored are the experiences initiation and transition periods for African American female university presidents when accepting the role at a school that is considered to be in definitive crisis, as the institutions first female president.

The existing culture of a university can present a challenge for an incoming president. In a panel discussion in March 2016, Dr. Dorothy Yancy spoke candidly about her belief that culture cannot be changed, particularly within the first few years of a presidency. What another sitting president on that same panel provided as a counter, was the fact that the existing nature of, the way in which entities on a campus participate in decision-making processes from can impact how a new president is able to maneuver in the beginning of her tenure. One of those entities is faculty. Lewis's (2011) study revealed culture to be a factor in decision-making at institutions of higher education, but specifically that of HBCUs. Lewis (2011) conducted a multi-site case study, using Minor (2004) Functional Model, to explore the role of faculty in decision making at two HBCUs, and to determine the challenges tenured faculty and senior level administrators face with trying to involve faculty in some level of shared governance. Lewis (2011) studied two different types of HBCUs – private and public, one with what Birnbaum (1988) describes as a collegial model of leadership and one with bureaucratic model Lewis categorized the findings related to challenges into two areas “institutional culture” and “structural constraints”. Faculty responses taut “fear” and a “domineering presidential leadership style” as what impacts the culture. A question for further exploration is how does a pre-existing culture where faculty are, or are not engaged, because of said culture, impact the integration and/or success of an incoming president? How do gender stereotypes about Black women play into perception? Can a president of an HBCU be successful without input in the decision-making process from faculty? These questions are part of what this study hopes to explore.

In chapter 1 the increased level of accountability is noted as part of what has increased the level of crisis for HBCUs. The relationship between the university president and the board of trustees, or board of governors/regents, is part of that accountability that historically and recently has also created a challenge to the presidency. Perhaps one of the historic time periods in which boards of trustee interference or influence was most prevalent was during the time of in the Civil Rights and anti-war movements her chapter on student lead activism, Chambers (Chambers & Hilton, 2016) highlights scenarios during the early 1960s and through the 1970s during multiple movements, where students impacted a campus's involvement and visibility or connection with controversial issues across the country. Chamber's work acknowledges both the general impact on both historically white colleges, and HBCUs, however notes that for HBCUs, the impact was often more impactful based on either primary funding sources or whether the institution still have a significant affiliation with a religious institution.

The literature on leadership and the college presidency is a very broad topic. Throughout the literature, however a number of recurring themes related to the evaluation of the ascension to and the success of, a position as the most senior administrator of a college and university, and one of those recurring themes is that of support and trust. Birnbaum (1988) introduces readers to the concept of the inter-dependencies of the subsystems on a college campus, and the co-mingling of those entities in the building and sustainability of institutions. Birnbaum uses the concept of coupling in describing the structures of colleges and universities. Birnbaum uses fictitious institutions as case examples of the systems. In the case description of "Huxley College" Birnbaum introduces the concept of coupling and survival. One shared reality among HBCU resembles a descriptor used for Huxley:



Huxley College has a large number of environmental relationships and demands that are inconsistent with each other...the college is under pressure from one part of the environment to increase test scores of entering students and from another part to increase student access...insisting on tight coupling [within the universities subsystems and the subsystems of the environment]...would cause Huxley to “freeze” internally”.

Often the blending of the external and internal systems of an institution causes inaction or overreaction. In either scenario the institution is harmed. In making the delineation of the university administrator as decision maker or sense maker, Birnbaum suggests that in order to strike a balance, university administrators must select from many “ the available alternatives, the one that most likely maximizes organizational goals” (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 78).

If one were to accept this as an acceptable rationalization, much of what the HBCU senior administrator is charged with is making the decisions that most significantly contribute to the success of the institution, while practicing mindfulness in terms of the collective HBCU mission. Historically HBCU leaders have had to make decisions that were necessary for the times, but often threw them into conflict or placed them at odds with the colleges’ boards of trustees.

While Chambers chapter denotes institution type as HWCU or HBCU, among HBCUs institution type has an added dimension of consideration- that of being public or private, particularly as it relates to its governing board. Williamson (2004, 2008) examines multiple aspects as it relates to the involvement of the HBCUs in Mississippi during the height of the Civil Rights Movement. While the “private status buffered institutions from direct state intervention since the legislature did not finance the colleges or appoint their board of

trustees...institutional vulnerabilities provide a [mechanism] for the state to force the private colleges to reevaluate their role in the...Movement” (Williamson, 2004, p. 52). Although of the biggest target of the Sovereign Commission of the three private colleges in Mississippi (Rust, Tougaloo, and Campbell) was Tougaloo, Williamson points out that Campbell College was the most vulnerable, stating throughout the article issues within and among the board of trustees as a majoring contributing factor. In addition to the funding streams for Campbell being based largely on black philanthropy, Campbell was affiliated with the African Methodist Episcopal church, and the board was comprised of all black members, local to the area. In a related 2004 article, which focuses primarily on Tougaloo, Williamson discusses the way in which the board of trustees hired Tougaloo president Adam Beittel, because of his liberal/Quaker background, with full support in order to lead Tougaloo, which was target of the state of Mississippi during the heated era of Civil Rights. The article describes the strides made by Beittel, with support of the board initially, aiding to gains for the institution, even amidst constant attempts to disenfranchise, and even disassemble the institution. Ultimately the board worked with and through Beittel to secure a more consistent funding source for the Tougaloo, and then forced an earlier than agreed upon retirement on him, stating his age as a hindrance of stability-building for the institution. In Williamson’s (2004) historical review of the three private colleges in Mississippi, the board interference ultimately had an ever greater impact on the management of the University. As the Sovereign Commission was able to infiltrate the board, Campbell College closed its doors in the mid-1960s.

The board of trustees are a group considered as presenting a growing challenge for college presidents in current history, both male and female. Hernquist (2009) interviewed with one of Yolanda Moses, who was the first woman to hold the position of president at City of

College of New York, in her chapter “Making Things Happen”. Moses recounts specifically the unanticipated challenge one (italics for emphasis) board of trustee had her tenure at City College of New York (CCNY):

[Her appointment as president] was approved by everyone of the trustees except one, a fact that would come back to haunt her...[She recounted a scenario involving the refusal of then-New York mayor Giuliani to take a picture with a potential donor which costs CCNY a significant scholarship for students]. The one trustee who had not voted for [her] hire told the mayor CCNY was not a first-class institution, and that if he had his picture taken with the students and Moses, he would be showing he supported the college (Bowers & Wolverton, 2009, p. 70).

While CUNY is not an HBCU, this lived scenario provides a glimpse into the challenges of a president in advancing institutional goals in spite of members of the board. The university president does function as the chief executive officer (CEO) of their institution (Bowen & Shapiro, 1998).

In America, presidents have served not only those students within their institutions, but also the faculty, staff and the external community. Largely just as a corporate CEO is accountable to a board of directors, presidents are held accountable by their governing boards. During an interview, previously conducted on educational leadership, an educational leader that supports private colleges said this, “many people do not realize if the board shifts its support of a president’s vision or agenda, that president is going to have difficult road (J. Brown, personal communication, 2014).

In terms of decision making, Minor notes the salient presence of race as a major influence in the decision making on black college campuses. What is missing from this study is a greater

consideration of the influence of boards of trustees. In terms of challenges to the university presidency, Minor (2004) shares the response of an interview in which the president stated how the racial climate and paradox of the mission hindered that president from entering partnerships that would benefit the university, and help that institution meet the expectations set by external stakeholders, because of the perception of diverging from the mission in the eyes of its board members. This is not unlike the many objections or interruptions experienced by Moses at CCNY, or the aforementioned instances of the presidents of campuses during the Civil Rights era.

In the American Council of Education study referenced above, Cook (2012) also looks at the lack of women's representation on university boards of trustees. This presents a challenge that may be two-fold. One is that at public colleges, women's representation on the board of trustees has been on a slow decline, and only increased at private institutions by 2-3 percentage points from 1997 to 2006, therefore there are fewer women to help inform the appointment process. The other challenge is when it is time to review a female president's progress and continued tenure as president, women are in the minority during deliberations at the level of the board. What is more disheartening is the White House Project, benchmarking women in leadership across various industries, acknowledges the static progress of the increase of women on governing boards, at public universities versus private. The study provides data on the percentage of minority representation on boards of trustees, but acknowledges it was unable to collect data that denoted the gender composition of those minorities.

What does this mean for the impact women or women of color have had or can have on the selection and retention of a black female, charged with leading an HBCU? If the board plays a critical role in the successfulness of an American college president, it would stand to reason

that the composition of that board, would also have an impact on one's uniquely situated tenure as the first female president to lead an American historically black college or university. Herein, as I collect the experiences of these presidents' transition into the role and their last 100 days, the composition of their respective boards will surely play a part.

A modern day example of the impact the board of trustees have on an HBCU president's tenure is that of South Carolina State University. Seymour's (2008) article addresses factors related to the challenges of leading public HBCUs in particular. In his article, Seymour first considers the experience of then- president of South Carolina State University. By bringing to the forefront the concerns surrounding the contract non-renewal of Andrew Hugine, Jr. Seymour is able to shine light on the issue of increasing influence of boards of trustees in the determination of the fit of the president. One of the "pitfalls" of presidents at public HBCUs seems to be the demographic make-up of the board members and the fact board members are often appointed by state legislature. While Seymour addresses the financial dependency public HBCUs have on state funding, the article broaches the subject through the political lens. Those interviewed for the article posit that to assume that there is not a huge political agenda and therefore, requirement to play politics for presidents, is a gross oversight for anyone assuming the chief executive role at a public HBCU. What is debatable, is the idea shared by the head of the Thurgood Marshall Foundation that longevity of HBCU presidents as compared to that of traditionally white institutions, can be attributed to the fact that "the demands of the job haven't changed much" (Seymour, 2008, p. 14). Another thinly veiled challenge noted was that of the board's over involvement in day-to-day affairs of these institutions, coupled with the reality that many board members are not educators (Gasman, 2007; Williamson, 2004). Finally, the article

leaves for further exploration that idea of unrealistic expectations from board members and alumni regarding the time it takes to move a challenged institution into a position of stability.

### **Leading as a Black Woman**

Jones, Dawkins, McClinton and Glover (2012) present several chapters in their book *Pathways to higher education administration for African-American women* that explore the various components of Black women moving into, sustaining and the impact of these women on the leadership and direction of colleges and universities in America. Jones et al. (2012) review important skills for women leaders, reviewing studies that differentiate not only between the attributes of leadership associated with men versus women, but they also look at the nuances in those attributes as essential to leadership among African-American women. In reference to a broader study, McClinton also posits results of traits that appear to be common or shared among Black women college and university presidents. Researchers indicated effective communication and credibility as the most crucial skills identified. That study also considered leadership style and type as tightly coupled to the essential skills for leadership for Black women.

Bower and Wolverton's (2009) book *Answering the Call* was an extension of their *Pathways to Leadership* series. In it, the authors interviewed seven African-American women in higher education leadership, inclusive of varying types of higher education institutions, accrediting agencies, and foundations. As an analysis of the narratives, Bower and Wolverton were able to categorize critical attributes of these African American female leaders into the development of what they coined the Six Cs of Leadership: caring, confidence, competence, communication, credibility, and a sense of calling. The authors consider these six C's as fundamental elements of leadership. Throughout the collection of narratives, the authors are able

to link a series of responses to as a demonstration of the characteristics of leadership. Of note, not each of the women exhibited or exuded each of the elements but the authors presented examples to support that each of the seven leaders displayed or projected at some point in their pathway to leadership three or more of the elements. As it relates to ‘caring’ 4 of the 7 expressed their belief and practice of ensuring their behaviors, decisions and agendas create an opportunity to future African-American female leaders on the rise to be able to move into the roles these women will eventually leave behind or exit.

Holmes (2004) found that both African American male and female presidents shared similarities in their challenges and experiences in the leadership role that was compounded by racism and class. Their perception of the experience and how they adapted to the various experiences were unique and “different based on their personalities” (Holmes, 2004, p. 26). Holmes’s findings included perceived reasons or rationale for the limited number of African American presidents in higher education in America across institution type. In doing so, she indicates part of the perception is that there is a low number of qualified applicants in the pool when vacancies occurred. More telling is the fact that there is a perception that senior administrators at HBCUs are not considered to be equally qualified as their counterparts at what may be considered peer institutions. While Holmes did not look specifically at the number of women being selected to lead HBCUs, or the number of black presidents, male or females, selected to lead HBCUs, there is some possibility that the same logic, impacts the perception of the greater higher education community and that of governance boards about the level of sufficient preparation a black women would bring to the presidency of a college.

When one looks at the success of the presidency, as noted by Bowen and Shapiro (1998), relationships with external entities are important. Thus race, coupled with classism or sexism,

would be expected to impact the ability to forge relationships. Holmes (2004) made a somewhat different discovery. A number of presidents indicated that race can be a contributing factor in developing relationships with various constituents depending on the institution, but they did not believe it was the primary factor in establishing relations with faculty, legislators, or governing board officials (Holmes, 2004, p. 32). A first-time female president indicated that she was less apprehensive about challenges of establishing rapport with faculty and staff because she was black, but the reality of her succeeding a black male who had had a rather adversarial relationship and demeanor. She thought she would have to contend with their misconception that she too, would have the same character, and lack true transparency (Holmes, 2004).

Anyone who attends sessions where women in leadership discuss their journey or pathway to leadership, one is sure to encounter at least one panelist that is candid about the biological matter of gender that is an actual and perceived roadblock to leadership. This review of literature touches on some articles where respondents share the challenge of balancing families with career as a roadblock, but there are reports that suggest statistically that balance presents a challenge as well. The White House Project, benchmarked women in leadership across industries. In review of the data on academia, one finds much of the same information reported by Cook (2012) as it pertains to the college presidency. However, the White House Project also reveals data related to family status. “Only 63% of female college presidents are married compared with 89% of male presidents; and only 68% have children (mostly over the age of 18), compared with 91% of the men” (Holmes, 2004, p. 20). Holmes’ (2004) found mentoring and support were common among the themes of the black presidents she interviewed, however the experience of mentorship and the impact of the familiar or spousal support differed by gender. The female presidents shared stories of strong spousal support or lack of spousal support. While



the level of support is unique to the individual, one of the arguments made was not about female not having the support of working in higher education, but the issue of not being supported during a time of increased visibility and demand that come with a role with such authority, causing contention within the home upon assuming the role of the president.

Howard-Hamilton and Patitu (2012) point out that in addition to attributes necessary for career advancement of administrators such as being respected, ability to think outside the box, being passionate about leadership and focused, 86% of 210 black female administrators interviewed stated that “knowledge of organizational culture/behavior was highly important in their jobs” (p. 88). Thus support from within and outside of the organization is critical to understanding organizational culture as well as finding personal balance and strength to traverse organizational challenges.

What was curious to me was an additional comment made by each woman of color in Sotello Viemes Turner (2007) study. None of them went into their career wanting to become a college president. Sotello Viemes Turner found what she called it the “it sort of happened” theme. Each, in their own ways, looked at the type of institution, what they felt they could contribute and went after an opportunity to impact said institution. Finally, of note, each woman was selected to lead an institution that was considered to be or established to be minority-serving or multicultural institutions, and indicates that the ‘being the first’ may occur more often in an institution that is, in some way, a reflection of the woman’s own cultural background. Bower and Wolverton (2009) presented stories of African American female leaders in higher education. In her interview, then-Spelman College president Beverly Tatum discussed choosing Spelman because its mission matched her natural passion.

In 1991 I had a spiritual awakening that has informed my choices ever since and has given further balance to my life. I sensed myself being called to antiracist education...

There have been times in my life since then when I have asked: Is this really the best use of my particular talents...It led me to choose to become a college president and, in particular, to be president at Spelman. (Bowers & Wolverson, 2009, p. 77)

Another president, Yolanda Moses shared that as she considered the presidency of the City College of New York, she chose it because it “resonated with [her] values...[She] was not looking for a presidency [but rather] looking for the next job and the right fit” (Bowers & Wolverson, 2009, p. 66).

### **Theoretical Considerations: The Dilemma of Being Black and Female**

Howard-Hamilton (2003) suggests two theoretical constructs for studying and explaining the experiences of African-American women in higher education which may be apropos in considering the experiences of African American women college presidents at HBCUs. She acknowledges that the experiences of African American women leaders in higher education has multiple layered, challenges beyond just operating in American as a black woman. Hamilton-Howard briefly explores black feminist thought and critical race theory. She considers the marginalization of black women as defined in black feminist theory as a status positing that “black women [move to a space where] they have been invited into places where the dominant group has assembled, but [the black women] remain outsiders because they are still invisible and have no voice when dialogue commences” (Howard-Hamilton, 2003, p. 21). Howard Hamilton goes on to discuss the key elements of the theory which is inclusive of the varied and unique stories of black women, but the intersectionality of those stories, and the realities that some of the stories told are told about the black woman but not by the black woman. There is also the

layered context of each story and the possibilities of building a more expansive collection of conceptual understanding for the common experiences as a result. She acknowledges black feminist thought has not been widely accepted or explored as many black women themselves do not self-identify as feminist based on the “mainstream definitions”.

Echoing hooks, Collins (2000) in her chapter Core Themes in Black Feminist Thought, poses another, often less stated but experienced challenge for black female leaders and that is a continuation of the impact on black men’s perceived competition with black women. Therefore, one of the reasons black women have not readily identified as feminist is because black women have been working through defining their own voices, and managing a multitude of personas or “negotiations that aim to reconcile the contradictions separating [their] own internally defined images of self as African-American women with [their] objectification as the Other” when compared to experiences outside of characteristics typically associated with feminism when proclaimed by white women in America” (Collins, 2000, p. 99). The other theory Hamilton-Howard proposes is that of critical race theory. Critical race theory considers the policy and policy making through a lens of historical and cultural context, and pushes the notion of racial discourse deeper than acts of overt racism. Critical race theory, suggests Hamilton-Howard (2003), in educational setting, considers the micro aggressions of racism and focuses on “liberating and transformative experiences for persons of color by exploring multiple cultural and personal contexts...” (p. 23).

As a foundation, this study will gather narratives in an effort to consider commonalities in the experiences of the four female presidents, with an expectation that each will tell her story through a lens uniquely hers. As black educated women, one may look to find shared, and then divergent themes, particularly as it relates to making decisions, following or veering away from

policy and policy making. However, while both of these theories could be used to explore the experiences of the black women who were first to lead selected HBCUs, both theoretical frameworks are broad, and require, also, the exploration of the layered context of each woman's personal experiences that lead to their pursuit, and perhaps more specifically, the extension of professional careers. Nothing in this review of secondary data, suggests that the female presidents selected for this study, as Hamilton-Howard cautions, consider themselves to be feminist. Yet, this study explores the possibility of another, lesser explored conceptual theory in the analysis of information gathered through the narrative inquiries.

### **Conceptual Framework - Glass Cliff**

Is there a significance in gathering the story of black women who have lead were selected to lead an HBCU that was considered to be in crisis? Might there have been a connection between being a woman and the status of the school? The idea of the glass ceiling has been a concept researchers have examined since the last 1970s The U.S. Department of Labor authorized a special Glass Ceiling Commission to explore the existence and impact of a glass ceiling that conducted research from 1991-1996 (retrieved from [www.ilr.cornell.edu](http://www.ilr.cornell.edu)). The Commission used as its definition of glass ceiling, that of the U.S. Department of Labor "those artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational bias that prevent qualified individuals from advancing upward in their organization into management-level positions" (Retrieved from [www.ilr.cornell.edu](http://www.ilr.cornell.edu)). The Commission reports further affirmed this notion that there is an unspoken, indescribable but definitive presence of a cap on the height within the ranks of an organization a woman and minorities can reach in certain sectors.

Howard-Hamilton and Patitu (2012) in their chapter "Decisions to Make (or not) along the career path" present a case study on career transitions and decisions. In the case study the

black female administrator was said to have learned to compartmentalize her experiences of being overlooked, hitting the “glass ceiling” and even her invisibility.

Carroll, Hennessy and MacDonald’s (2013) research further introduce into the literature on gender the phenomenon of the ‘glass cliff’. “The glass cliff suggests that females are more likely than males to hold or be appointed to senior positions in organizations that are in crisis” (Carroll et al., 2013, p. 9). Carroll et al. examined the appointments of females to the board of directors of top Canadian companies, as determined by their position in the security market, in 2006 and 2008. The researchers also studied the performance of companies in the same industry who appointed a male to the board in the same year. Carroll et al. concluded that females were not being selected with an intention to place them in precarious positions. In their study, Carroll et al. (2013) found there was a balance in women being selected to lead organizations that have strong market performance even before the appointments were made.

There is little empirical data regarding this concept but it has been one that has grown as a topic in popular press. Ryan, Haslam and Postmes (2007) studied the reactions to men and women related to the phenomena of the glass cliff as a growing form of subtle sexism in the workplace.

Extending the metaphor of the glass ceiling and the glass elevator, Ryan and Haslam argue that, compared to men, women are more likely to find themselves on a glass cliff, such that their positions of leadership are associated with greater risk and an increased possibility of failure, and can thus be seen as more precarious (Ryan et al., 2007, p. 183). The concept of the glass cliff has grown as various types of organizations, including political entities began moving toward balancing the gender diversity in the upper ranks of management.

Researchers indicate the rise in the number of women being selected to lead, raised also the question or review of the circumstances and conditions under which appointments were made.

In contrast with other researchers who may consider the leadership styles associated with women as the reason, Ryan and Haslam (2006) considered an alternative to the reasons in the upward trend of women in leadership of corporations and government. In this 2007 study, they examined the responses to men and women related to the concept. Of relevance to the current research on the experiences of women who are the first to lead HBCUs are themes that emerged in the explanations for the glass cliff categorized in Ryan, Haslam and Postmes. Those categorical themes include sexism, in-favoritism, women expendability, and lack of opportunities, lack of support, gender stereotypes, equality, company factors, and denial of phenomenon. The themes with the highest frequency of response were sexism, gender stereotypes, and lack of opportunities. Responses varied by gender of respondents as well, often times to the extent that primary feedback was gathered from one gender over another:

Related to explanations based on discrimination and in-group favoritism, respondents also argued that women are appointed to glass cliff positions because company decision makers see women as more expendable and are thus more willing to put them forward for leadership positions of dubious status. Moreover, in such positions women may be more attractive as potential scapegoats who can be shouldered with blame should things go wrong...Once more, gender also played a role in such explanations. So while over 13 per cent of women favored expendability and scapegoating as explanations of the glass cliff, no men generated this as a response (Ryan & Haslam, 2006, p. 188).

Most significant in Ryan and Haslam's (2009) study is the issue of the complexity in evaluating the existence or influence of a potential glass cliff, particularly when the studies only

consider the financial performance of an organization as a determinant of a precarious environment (p. 15). When viewing an organization to be at risk, one must look beyond “risk as operationalized in terms of poor performance but [consider risk also as] defined by a history of failure, a high risk of criticism, and low levels of support or lack of resources” (Haslam & Ryan, 2008). In this vein, the context Ryan and colleagues describe fits the perception of conditions at historically black colleges and universities. Of interest to this study are the considerations of expandability and scapegoating rationale, thus suggesting that decision makers are more willing to put women forward for leadership positions of dubious status. Moreover, in such positions women may be more attractive as potential scapegoats who can shoulder with blame should things go wrong. As one respondent suggested:

Women will be placed in glass cliff situations because women are expendable. A glass cliff requires a competent individual so senior managers will figure which candidates can handle the role. Then they will take out any candidates that they are grooming or care about in order to protect them. Those will often be men, because senior managers are men and are more likely to mentor younger men than they are women. So the candidate pool they are left with will have a large percentage of women – women who are capable, yet expendable because no one is really rooting for their success (Female middle-manager, 35)

That is worth exploring in the crafting and design of the interview. Also gender stereotypes act that “women always want to help, and often help the underdog” women “have more skills to balance risk” and that they “tend to cope with failure more pragmatically than men”. These perceived abilities are epitomized in the comments of one respondent when describing the reasons why she thought her mother had been placed in a glass cliff situation: In certain cases,

women are thought to inherently possess “soft” skills that make them part manager – part human resource director.

My mother was given a department of viciously feuding staff members to oversee – a job that no-one in their right mind would take – because, aside from her managerial skills, they felt that she could “smooth things over”. Not something a man would be expected to do (Female professional, 35).

And another: Women are perceived to be more competent in crises involving other people and their fate.

In Bower and Wolverton’s (2009) interview with Yolanda Moses, Moses’ interview revealed conditions that lend a contextual example of the glass cliff theory in an academic setting. About her immediate understanding of the role once she was selected for the presidency, as the first woman but not the first black, of City College of New York:

[Moses who began at CCNY in 1993 and served until 1999], was brought in to make deeper budget cuts, reorganize departments and programs, and repair the reputation of the institution...the state had a budget shortfall and it needed to figure out ways to close the gap... New York Times reported the state appropriations [to higher education] had decreased to 40% [between 1980-1999], and city appropriations decreased by almost 90% during the same period” (Bower & Wolverton, 2009, p. 66).

While only one example, it lends itself to further explore the possibilities of this conceptual theory in the slowly increasing selection of women into senior executive roles within other industries.

In an attempt to expand the available research regarding the glass cliff, Kulich, Ryan and



Haslam (2014) considered the probability of the glass cliff concept in the selection of political candidates in the United Kingdom parliament as it related to blacks and other minority ethnic groups (BME). They hypothesized that during the preselection process BME were chosen to challenge the less winnable seats based on a set of criteria. They considered archival data to conduct their research. The researchers' results showed some significance, but what was of greater consideration was the discussion of the characteristics ascribed to BMEs, that are similar to those found to be associated with gender-specific roles that may provide credibility to the reasons why women and also BMEs are considered to be better suited for roles that are more challenging. Kulich et al. (2014) suggest that there are two characteristics that presented in prior research that are key in effective leadership. Those two characteristics were warmth and competence. The significance of the results for those ethnic minority candidates (considered as a larger group by the researchers as a 'low status group') for Conservative seats in Parliament did not indicate that selected candidates were any less competent than their white opponents. However, warmth was a characteristic often ascribed to non-white, and separately female candidates.

To analyze key factor of consideration for the importance of the assumption of a role of senior leader in a bound academic system, I use Suber's (1996) dissertation on the initiation and transition periods for new public school superintendents as a guide. While not exactly a one to one match for the university presidency, superintendents certainly have equally similar challenges as those experienced by university presidents. Suber (1996) loosely compares the initiation and transition to the new superintendency to the periods of time experiences by U.S. presidents from the time they win the election to the time the first take office, through their first 100 days on the job (p. 2). What Suber uncovers in her interviews is a consistent theme around

some of the challenges in play with the prevailing climate. Of note, in her interviews with the two female superintendents, both indicate coming into a system behind an outgoing superintendent and/or a recent history of short-term superintendents who were just not good fits with the system. In both cases, the female superintendents followed male superintendents who no longer were able to match the vision the board of supervisors had for those particular counties or school systems. In addition to depicting the influence of the prevailing climate that may pose a challenge to a new leader in an educational system, Suber's (1996) findings are telling and all shed light on the phenomenological concept of establishing a climate for the transition, and the need to use the interview process to establish potential allies. The women interviewed in the study also talk about personal sacrifices of time and commitment to ready themselves for their role of superintendent, far before the opportunity actually was presented.

### **Summary**

There probably is no prototype of what makes a successful HBCU president, just as there is no definitive, exclusive model of the successful HBCU. It would not be realistic to suggest that one study would uncover the traits, skills, abilities or career path that would make a woman successful as a HBCU president leading an institution that is faced with declining or fluctuating enrollment, financial instability and challenges from accrediting bodies. The researcher will attempt to determine themes and commonalities throughout the stories of just a few, as a way to add to the literature and preparation of future aspiring university administrators. The narratives collected and reviewed herein, may lend further support to the challenges and rewards of leading as a black woman. The historic context of historically black colleges and/or the patriarchy therein, may develop as a theme in their experiences. There may be a blurred line related to the influence of the board during periods of major change, or the boards' underlining intention of

selecting a black woman to sit at the helm of an institution in transition. When considering success of a president's tenure, particularly at an institution in crisis, one must look at the delicate dilemma created by the growing influence of boards of trustees, and what the new college president's relationship with the board of trustee truly means. In my study, I will interview former presidents, both at public and private HBUCs, where the board of trustees' structure varied. I will consider a bounded timeframe, and listen to explore the myriad of factors, inclusive of the level of accountability to which the presidents were held, that may have caused an interruption to the work the presidents were hired to do.

## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **Overview and Purpose of the Study**

This chapter discusses the approach and research design of this study. This section also includes the rationale for qualitative approach. The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of black women who served as the first female president of a historically black college or university. Sotello Viernes Turner's (2007) study purports a belief that "opportunities for women of color to be firsts may occur more often in institutions that reflect their own cultural backgrounds" (p. 27). The intent of this study was to collect the narratives of a select group of women whose experiences provided insight and a foundation for managing expectations of future and current African-American women who aspire to senior-level administrative positions, or to lead historically or predominantly black institutions, and nuances of having that experience as the first (*italics for emphasis*) woman.

According to Creswell (2012) "qualitative research should contain an agenda to reform lives of the participants, institutions in which they live and work, or even the researchers' lives" (p. 26). In each of the selected cases, the president is no longer seated in the position for which she discussed (recorded). Therefore, while the outcomes did not reform the lives of the participants, the outcome certainly have the possibility of reforming the institutions who appointed, or are considering the appointment and retention of their first female president. The outcomes also have an impact on the lives of those female administrators intending to lead an HBCU. Black women in the HBCU presidency is an underexplored topic in the literature. A snapshot of what was explored was outlined herein through the literature review, but there are few studies that explore specific experiences of black women who have served in the role of historically black college president or chancellor. In the 1990s with the shift in college

attendance, particularly black college attendance, governing boards were beginning to select women to lead HBCUs increasingly more, and those women seemed to be selected to lead schools that were in crisis or major transitions (Allen & Jewell, 2002; Bower & Woverton, 2009; Kitwana, 2002). Of the 38 black women who were leading colleges and universities in 1998, the majority were leading community colleges or HBCUs.

A qualitative study was the most appropriate for this study. In considering various methods of qualitative research, Denzin (1989) described a biographical method of research that considers documentation of one's life events, and describes turning-point milestones in a person's life (p. 7). While the research uncovered that the time in a presidency is like a 'life' unto its own, a purely biographical method was not the best approach to considering the experience, or for the interpretation of that experience for potential future Black female college presidents.

This study was conducted using narrative inquiry. Narrative inquiries are most effective when a researcher is looking to explore what occurred in a period of time, and if there was significance within the occurrence. In her paper, designed to make the argument for narrative inquiry as a central and not complementary research method, Thomas (2012) simply defined the research method as a method best used to "investigate what happened, the significance or meaning of that, and how it is told or shared" (para. 15). In this current study, the narratives of the participants' individualized experience as the first Black female president/chancellor considered 3 distinct timeframes of their presidency. Given the scrutiny under which HBCUs and the leadership therein often operate, it was unlikely that a survey, focus groups, or extensive reviews of secondary data, would have revealed or given evidence regarding the existence of a potential glass cliff in the lived experiences of these presidents, with the same accuracy as an interpretation of their narratives. Ryan and Haslam (2006) introduced the aforementioned

conceptual theory of glass cliff. This study used this as an interpretive framework as a consideration of the selection and shared experiences of these women at these particular types of institutions.

### **Participant Selection Process**

Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2014) discussed the research design inherent in qualitative research, considering the benefit and limitations of tight versus loose design. In determining the participants, I considered facts in the inclusion criteria based on background knowledge as well as possible patterns of interrelationships. To be considered for this study, the participant had to have met the following inclusion criteria:

1. Be an African-American woman; (who)
2. Was appointed and served as the first Black, female president;
3. During the bounded timeframe of 1994-2014 (to)
4. A baccalaureate (or higher) degree granting, historically black college or university considered to be in a state of crisis or major transition; (and is)
5. No longer serving in that role at the same institution.

As the purpose of this study was to consider that shared experiences, if any, in the recorded narratives of black women who served as the first female to lead an HBCU, the participants had to be African-American women. The history of women of color is limited in the literature and research of higher education leadership (Gasman, 2007, 2011), and that of black women leading within academy is even less researched. The bounded timeframe was selected due the increase in the appointments of women, but specifically black women, to the role of university president during that window of time (Cook, 2012); and those appointments were primarily at community colleges and HBCUs (Jones et al., 2012). The study also specifically considered the nuances, if

any, of being a woman leading an historical black institution, which has historically been an institution that faces additional challenges with sustainability, validity and in recent years seen significantly higher rates of vacancies in the presidential position (Allen & Jewel, 2002; Broussard & Hilton, 2016; Kimbrough, 2014).

While writing about colleges that were struggling, Bowen and Shapiro (1998) acknowledged that telling stories with great accuracy through narratives, was easier when describing and sharing the findings for schools that had closed because no one was trying to protect their positions; and there was no dispute that the school had closed, “just varying reasons for the why”. Similarly, it was the consideration of the researcher that the same would be true for presidents who were no longer leading the institution where they served as ‘the first’; no question that they were the selected to be first, and no question that they were no longer leading by choice or by circumstance, only varying reasons as to why and what happened in the last 100 days. Therefore, I first determined how many black women were appointed as president or chancellor of HBCUs during the timeframe selected for the study – 1994 through 2014- the first three criterion.

There were 22 four-year degree granting, historically black institutions that appointed its first woman to lead during the bounded timeframe. In some instances, the same woman was appointed as the first to lead two different institutions. That narrowed the pool to 18 women. This study considered the period of transition into the role, the first one hundred days and the final 100 days, thus the selected participants could no longer be serving in her role as the respective institution’s first female president. That eliminated 5 presidents/chancellors. Another identifier arose. According the White House Initiative on HBCUs’ report as of May 2015, there were 21 states with HBCUs. Of those states, during the period of focus for this research, the state

of North Carolina had a large number of HBCUs, with 11 accredited four-year institutions which included almost an equal number of public and private institutions. This made it the state with the most historically black four-year and post-baccalaureate degree-granting institutions. During the process of narrowing the potential participant pool, it was also discovered that HBCUs in North Carolina had the highest number of first-female president/chancellor appointments (7 of the 11 HBCUs in the state appointed women for the first time between 1994-2014). North Carolina also boasts a large network of diversity in terms of institution type, with a university system of 16 public institutions (which includes the nation's oldest public university), 32 private four-year, masters and doctoral degree granting institutions, and a community college system of 58 institutions. While Mary Elizabeth Branch is acknowledged as the first African American woman to serve as president of a bachelor degree-granting institution – Tillotson College (which became Huston-Tillotson College in Texas), North Carolina's Bennett College touts the appointment of Dr. Willa Player in 1955 as "the first black woman to head a four-year college in the United States" (Brown & Heintz, n.d.; Unknown, 2003, para.1) that still remains as it did during her tenure. The next black female president to lead a four-year college was also appointed to lead an HBCU in North Carolina – Mabel Parker McLean- in 1973, at Barber-Scotia College. Of note, during the period of focus of this study, Barber-Scotia became one of the first HBCUs in recent history to close due to the loss of its accreditation. One of the others, was Morris-Brown College in Georgia, which also lost accreditation but continues to try and operate beyond the change in status.

Narrowing the pool to North Carolina, I looked for women whose unique story may best relay experiences of possible successes, hazards and pitfalls to future African-American women aspiring to be university presidents or senior administrators at HBCUs. The inclusion criteria of



looking at schools in one state or region, also strengthened the possibility of patterns of interrelationship (Miles et al., 2014), and the opportunity for considering shared meaning through cross-comparisons of the experiences. These factors made a focus on HBCUs in North Carolina a rich sampling site for the possible transferability of themes that may evolve from the study participants' narratives. The large number of higher-education options including 11 HBCUs, and popular options for lower-scoring high school graduates like community colleges, in the state of North Carolina, greatly increased the competition for enrollment amongst the HBCUs in the state. That competition for enrollment at public colleges in a state where out-of-state admissions have a cap (C. Peruse, personal communication, 2013), can pose a challenge in distinguishing its offerings and campus to state residents, and brand differentiation impacts the institution's ability to fundraise. The intrastate competition had the potential to more greatly impact the 5 private institutions, as private schools heavily rely on tuition as that primary source of funding (Weisbrod, Ballou, & Ash, 2008). Decreases in state funding has a greater potential to put public HBCUs in a state of financial crisis since "at public colleges and universities, support from one level of government or another is dominant- 65% at four-year schools..." (Weisbrod et al., 2008, p. 31).

Finally, I considered the presidents themselves. Five of the presidents met the selection criteria, but two served tenures that were shorter than 18 months. Therefore, the selected participants included women who were selected to lead institutions that were noted in the media as going through major transitions and/or were being described as having declining enrollment, low graduation rates and/or challenges with fundraising and institutional development which impacted the perception of financial stability.

The women selected for the study were Dr. Dorothy CowserYancy who was appointed in 1994 to Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, a major city for commerce, tourism and banking in the state; Dr. Dianne Boardley Suber, who was appointed in 1999 to lead Saint Augustine's (College) University, one of two HBCUs located in the state capital of Raleigh, and Dr. Thelma "T. J." Bryan, selected to lead Fayetteville State University in Fayetteville, which is the state's second oldest public institution. Dr. Bryan's 2003 appointment was unique as she was (also) the first black women to be appointed as chancellor to one of the University of North Carolina system schools. It was through presentations or talks given by these women, separately or on panels, review of media coverage of the status of each institution prior to their assumption of the presidency and even the conditions of the institution just prior to the announcement of their departure from the role, that lead the researcher to consider the continuum of their tenure, and what similarities or unique experiences they had. As this study focused on the period of transition into the position post the announcement, the first 100 days and the final 100 days, I used of news media and related periodicals to set the descriptor for how the president was positioned to external constituents. By reviewing media portrayal of the school's status, level of crisis or increased need for major change, the researcher was able to better frame, and future scholars can draw cross-comparisons to the characteristics ascribed to these women as they took over and lead these HBCUs.

### **Research Design**

This was a qualitative study that used narrative inquiry as the primary research method. This researcher interviewed each participant and collected the stories of three black, women presidents who served at HBCUs in the North Carolina as the first female to lead their respective institutions. The research method employed was narrative inquiry, as the goal was to draw

meaning from the experiences and circumstances in which Black females were selected as the first female presidents at HBCUs during a period of perceived crisis or in major transition for the institutions based on type, and the subsequent transition of those women out of the role. Using a semi-structured interview protocol, the research chronologically ordered the meaning of these women's experiences (Creswell, 2012) by focusing on the collective narratives of these presidents' period of transition into the role after their appointment was announced, their first 100 days on the job, and their final 100 days.

Increasingly the narrative has been used to study leadership in a variety of industries including public administration:

For researchers of social life, narratives not only help to explore issues such as personal identity, life-course development, and the cultural and historical worlds of narrators, they also help to explore specific phenomena, such as leadership and organizational change, and how they are experienced by social actors (Ospina & Dodge, 2005, p. 143).

The data collection included: study participants' interviews, review of documents including periodicals related to their presidency and the conditions/status of the institution during each of the bounded timeframes, and artifacts shared by each participant which they deem critical in denoting any turning points, or evidence of success or failure. Interviews will be conducted face-to-face and the audio recordings will be transcribed. The selected participants are retired presidents, so interviews did not take place on the campus where they formerly served. As part of the institutional review board process, the participants signed consent forms giving the researcher permission to be represented using their names and the names of the institution, in order to add to the richness of the meaning drawn from the analysis of their narratives. The secondary data/document reviewed was used to enhance the thick description of each institution

and the climate at the time the respective president officially began her tenure, and the climate and perception of the status of the institution during her last 100 days. The description “allows readers to make decisions regarding transferability...to other settings because of shared characteristics” (in Creswell, 2012, p. 252; Erlandson, 1993). As the goal was not to form judgment on the evidence and events as presented by the storytellers of their experiences, the primary data collection tool was that of an interview protocol that did not restrict the narrative but, in some way, brought focus on the initiation into, and transitions during and out of the presidency. The narratives were interpreted using the conceptual framework of the glass cliff, as described in Chapter 2.

### **Delimitations**

The participants were selected based on a number of factors as described in great detail above. Given the rise of women being selected as the highest ranking campus official during the mid-1990s, this study was time bound between 1994 and 2014. The selection factors included the period of appointment, institution type (the school to which they were appointed as the first female had to be an HBCUs) and current status at the associated institution (participants had to have been appointed during the time period being studied, and had to have concluded their tenure at the selected institution). An unforeseen development in the inclusion criteria became that of institution geographic location (each president selected was appointed to a school in the same state). Data collection was also bound in order to specifically explore three timeframes. Those timeframes were the period between the appointment to the position and the first day in the role, or transition into the presidency; the initiation period, or the first 100 days; and, transition out of that role, or the last 100 days.

In each of the cases, the participant who was selected was no longer the sitting president at the institution. This allowed for a more candid interview, and perhaps rigorous honesty in their accounts of not only the initiation and transition into the presidency but also their transition out. In the literature review, there is limited scholarly information on the period of transition out of the historically black university presidency. Finally, this sample represented both women who served as the first female president of an HBCU and went on to lead other higher education institutions, and those who did not assume another role as president of any higher education institution. The delimitations included the study focus on only the leadership experience for black women, who were the first to lead an HBCU who are no longer the president at that respective institution. The study did not consider the experiences of black women who lead community colleges or black women who assumed the presidency of an HBCU but was not the first female to do so at that school.

### **Trustworthiness**

When conducting qualitative research, the researcher is involved with every aspect of data collection, and it may be helpful for the researcher's experiences and perspective to be captured, and managed during the interview and analysis process (Lapan, Quartaroli, & Riemer 2011; Patton, 2002; Weiss, 1994). The researcher was an acquaintance of the selected participant who led Johnson C. Smith University, during her tenure, yet had no other affiliation with that institution. The researcher was privy to and present during private, candid conversations about the general experience, prior to the commencement of this study. It is also important that I make a personal disclosure that I was employed as an African-American administrator, at Saint Augustine's University during the period of the selected president's last 100 days, and beyond. My review and analysis of that participant's oral history may be perceived as being presented

with some distortion. In an effort to diminish the effects of researcher bias and increase trustworthiness, I took copious notes using the interview which was recorded, as well as maintained a journal of follow up questions and reflections, reserved until after the transcription was complete, as narratives require the retelling of stories with limited interruption (Ospina & Dodge, 2005; Thomas, 2012).

To enhance trustworthiness, participants reviewed transcripts of their own interview and were given an opportunity to clarify meaning or intent. The interview protocol is included in the appendix of the study.

Narratives inquiry also has a limitation of chronological sequencing, and possible distortion in the “restorying” as participants typically recall lived experiences out of sequence, and may blend details of two similar scenarios. There are always limitations in any research that focuses on a particular population of cultures and/or groups (Washington, 2008). As I coded the responses, I was able to ask follow-up questions of the participants to better analysis their stories based on the bounded timeframes.

The anticipated limitation of this study was access to secondary data -periodicals and other documentation from the institutions related to each participants’ tenure in the presidency. Given the lack of technological advancement during the time of appointment for most of the intended participants, information may be limited. That limitation proved to be a challenge. Where secondary data was not accessible, university archives were available by request (for the public university) and comparisons to national publications was used to fill in missing information or verify the participants’ memory. There was a benefit in meeting with each participant in person, and sharing the protocol in advance, as each woman provided her own copies of a great deal of secondary data. I took into consideration that that which was presented or

gathered from university resources was presented with bias. Creswell (2012) suggests there are limitations with story distortions and authenticity. Where possible, the researcher identified information, in the analysis, based on the source, including supporting documentation provided by the participants directly.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of black women who served as the first female president to lead an HBCU. In selecting the participants, several factors were considered including the year in which the woman served as the president, the type of institution to which she was appointed to lead, her status at said institution during the time of the study (had she exited the role), and the status of the institution (was it in crisis or facing major transition).

The bounded timeframe of this study was to focus on women who were appointed between 1994-2014, and in each case, it was critical to the study that the woman no longer be serving in the president/chancellor's capacity during the time of the interviews. One of the most under researched periods in a president's tenure is the end of the tenure. This study used narrative inquiry as the primary research method because of the uniqueness of each participant's experience, and because narrative inquiry has been used increasingly more consistently when attempting to draw meaning from an experience - even beyond that of biographical method. Considering the depth of the experience that is a college president's tenure, the researcher specifically considered for exploration and analysis the period of transition into the role, the participant's first 100 days and final 100 days in the position.

Given the increase in the number of black women selected to lead American universities, but particularly community colleges and HBCUs during the bounded timeframe, a question existed as to what may have been a reason for this shift in the gender of the presidency at these

types of institutions. Considering the status of HBCUs during the timeframe the researcher analyzed the narratives collected using the glass cliff as a conceptual theory. While the researcher did not originally intend to consider only HBCUs operating in the state of North Carolina, the selection process led the researcher to select women who had all lead black colleges (both private and public) in North Carolina. Using the glass cliff as a conceptual theory allowed for the revelation that factors in the success or perceived failure early in the tenure of each woman were influenced by the nature of higher education in southern communities. Those factors may have contributed to the shared experiences amongst the narratives of those selected. Studying the tenures of the black women who were the first to lead HBCUs in North Carolina – as the largest number of historically black colleges as compared to any other state in the union, increased the richness and transferability of the results. I am a university administrator at an HBCU in North Carolina, so I believe I took appropriate measures to limit the influence of any bias, but did consider, in my review, my own experiences as I analyzed and collected secondary data as I tried to draw meaning from the narratives, in a way that will add to the literature in the field, and allow this research to serve as a resource to aspiring HBCU college presidents.



## **CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

In this chapter the results of the data analysis are presented and explored. It begins with the data collection, and a brief introduction to the campuses each of the respective presidents were selected to lead. In order to set each instance as a unique experience but also to begin to determine a foundation for any commonalities, the condition of each university, at the time the president was interviewed and was selected for her presidency, is described. The primary tool for data collection was narrative inquiry, therefore data presented is derived primarily from presidents' responses to a few broad questions asking participants to reflect on their experiences as they prepared to take the helm of their respective university, milestone/monumental experiences of their time as the permanent president/chancellor, pivotal moments during their tenure, and the last 100 days in that role. Throughout narrative inquiry each woman was able to identify specific moments that she believed help define her experience as the leader of the respective institutions. Those experiences were categorized as pivotal moments. Those moments did not all occur during the time-bound periods of the study (the period of transition, the first 100 days or the last 100 days). Thus, in addition to a brief synopsis of the accomplishments gathered through the research, those milestones and pivotal moments give a fuller description of each woman's story.

The presidents' narratives and accounts, as well as supporting documentation drawn from print media during the time of the appointment, are used to develop a description of the condition of the university. This description is intended to also provide data that may support the classification of said university as a school in crisis at the time the university's governing board selected its first woman president. As outlined in chapter 1, given the title at the respective institutions may vary, president and chancellor will appear interchangeably throughout this

chapter. This chapter considers the experiences of the following women: Dr. Thelma “T. J.” Bryan during her time at Fayetteville State University, Dr. Dianne Boardley Suber during her time at Saint Augustine’s University, and Dr. Dorothy Cowser Yancy during her time at Johnson C. Smith University – all in North Carolina.

**Dr. Thelma Jane (T. J.) Bryan: First Woman Chancellor of Fayetteville State University**

Dr. T. J. Bryan received her undergraduate degree from Morgan State (College) University in English-Speech in 1970. She also completed a Master of Arts from Morgan State in English, and earned her terminal degree from University of Maryland in 1982 in American and Victorian Literature. She served as faculty, and Dean of Arts and Sciences over a 20-year career at Coppin State. Prior to becoming chancellor for Fayetteville State University, she held several senior level administrative roles including Associate Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs, and Vice Chancellor of Academic and Student Affairs, in the University of Maryland and Pennsylvania state university systems, respectively. She has several notable accomplishments in the academy, and has completed selective academic leadership training institutes through American Association of State Colleges and Universities, and Harvard. Dr. Bryan had been with the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education for a year when she accepted the chancellorship at Fayetteville State University. Dr. Bryan was no longer in the president’s office on the campus of Fayetteville State University. She is no longer at the institution where she began with an enrollment of approximately 5,000 students. We did not meet on the campus she was selected to lead as “the right person to lead...through a period of dramatic growth and transformation [according to UNC President Molly Broad]” (Thrasher, 2003a, p. A1). Therefore, our meeting was held, on November 12, 2016, in the city with which she has considered home for most of her adult life, Baltimore, Maryland.

## **What She Walked Into – A School in Crisis**

Fayetteville State University is the second oldest public university in the state of North Carolina, with the University of North Carolina- Chapel Hill being the first (Retrieved from [www.uncfs.edu](http://www.uncfs.edu)). According the university's website (Unknown, n.d.), the school was a formed as a way to build on the fundamental education being provided by two other post-emancipation schools in Fayetteville, North Carolina, on land purchased by seven African-American men in 1867 as the Howard School. Those seven men formed what would today be considered the first governing body of the institution.

...Building on the curriculum, the leadership of the Howard School added geography and science classes, the latter after its first telescope was acquired. Even then, the community understood the opportunity and the obligation to “build on strengths.” All of this progress occurred in the midst of an economic depression that threatened the entire town.

Remarkably, African Americans in Fayetteville continued to donate funds to support the school, demonstrating the high value the black community placed on education...Seven visionary Black citizens of Fayetteville... form[ed] among themselves a self-perpetuating Board of Trustees to maintain the property for the education of Black youth (Retrieved from [www.uncfsu.edu/pr/fsu-history](http://www.uncfsu.edu/pr/fsu-history), para. 2).

Fayetteville State University is located a dichotomous location in that there it may be considered an urban- rural blend of a community. Situated in the same county are Ft. Bragg army base, the area has a highly transient population. Ft. Bragg is the largest military installations in the world.

The city of Fayetteville is the fourth largest metropolitan area in the state. However, the neighboring counties are small and have generations of families as residents. Fayetteville State

University has its inter-city competition Methodist University, which is a predominantly white, independent university.

Once she was offered and accepted the position as chancellor, Dr. Thelma “T. J.” Bryan arrived on the campus of Fayetteville State University, almost sight unseen. According to our interview, she had only made a day-trip visit to the campus prior to her initial interview for the position which actually took place at the Raleigh-Durham International airport in Raleigh, NC. She recalls having only traveled to the state of North Carolina on less than a handful of occasions, those occasions being for conferences or trainings in cities that were some distance from Fayetteville. Referencing the length of time between the airport interview and the call back for a second round of interviews Dr. Bryan shared this:

I didn't hear anything for a while so I'd just written Fayetteville off. Then I got a call and I was asked to come to Chapel Hill ... I was also there for a whole day being interviewed by all these people.

She spoke also about her preparation for the possible interview, acknowledging that she likes to be prepared so she read everything she could find about Fayetteville State University.

[Before the call came for the second interview] I went to Fayetteville before I had the interviews at Chapel Hill because I had never been to Fayetteville. I thought it was a nice campus and, you know, small town. Again, I didn't hear anything for a while so I just moved on.

During her interview, Dr. Bryan shared that based on her knowledge and recollection of events, she was the UNC system's second choice. She disclosed that person she believes to have been the first pick decided not to move forward in the process after a visit to campus (the person she named subsequently was selected to lead another HBCU in the UNC system). This reality was

confirmed in the Fayetteville Observer article announcing her appointment as well (Thrasher, 2003a, p. A4).

Dr. Bryan was made an offer to lead an institution that the front runner for the role decided not to accept after making a visit to campus and the city of Fayetteville. What were the conditions for which Dr. Bryan was expected to improve or transform at Fayetteville State University? On July 1, 2003, Bryan took over a university that was in transition. In an article by Duval (2002) detailing the announced resignation of Bryan's predecessor, a board of trustee member was quoted as saying "The university is at a critical crossroad. I believe that we must immediately begin the search process to identify and select the person who best suits the needs of the university and the community it serves" (Duval, 2002, para. 2); and President Broad of the UNC system was quoted in a *Diverse Issues in Higher Education* July 2003 article denoting Bryan's appointment as being during a period of "dramatic growth and transformation" for FSU (Stuart, 2012, para. 6). Bryan was replacing a chancellor who was also an alumnus. Dr. Willis McLeod had been at the helm of the 136-year-old institution for 8 years. He served as chancellor during the North Carolina vote in 2000 which resulted in FSU being rewarded \$45.5 million in bond money to construct new buildings and make renovations. He also served as head of the institution when entities within state government were considering major changes to the branding of the institution, which had potential implications on alumni giving and support. In June of 2002, one year prior to Bryan's announcement but one month before the announced resignation of Dr. McLeod, two matters were gaining increasing coverage in the press. The first, North Carolina Rep. Bill Hurley filed a bill to change the name of Fayetteville State University to UNC-Fayetteville. FSU had officially part of the UNC state system in 1972 (Duval, 2002; Thrasher, 2003b). Her predecessor, according to Duval (2002), had remained neutral on the

matter of the controversial name change study (White, 2002). The second involved a vendor contract. Shaw Foods, a food service company based in Fayetteville, which had serviced the university for 10 years, and was affiliated with a state senator, lost the food services contract in May 2002 to Aramark (Stoddard, 2002). McLeod announced his resignation in July 2002. An article in *The Fayetteville Observer* alluded to both the name change controversy and an unpopular food service contract being preludes to this announcement.

She also arrived days before the release of findings from the 2001-2002 were reported. She had done her research on the school's finances at the urging of many of her colleagues including her sister, who was a president of a community college in another state. Her informal advisors warned:

Before you take that job, check into the business area because HBCUs just have terrible issues with their finances. [To which Bryan replied], "Well I talked with people at the system office and I looked at Fayetteville State's audit reports and they looked okay" ...when I told my sister that I had been told the business operations were fine, she said "Are you going to believe them?" I said "Well I don't have any information to the contrary" ...I did not know I was walking into a mess because right before I came [FSU] had just had all these .... financial audit findings"

A December 2003 newspaper article revealed the details of a series of poor business and financial operations that resulted in the significant findings in a 2001-2002, but more poignantly, comments from her predecessor in that same article suggested he was aware of the financial challenges and had attributed them to high turnover in that area (the extent to which limited activity and attention to financial and purchasing issues had resulted in major findings during an audit for which results were reported just as Bryan arrived (Thrasher, 2003b).

According to the newspaper accounts, FSU's enrollment in 2001 had been 5010 students. According to Dr. Bryan's vitae, when she arrived in July 2003 enrollment was at 5200, however, in our interview she revealed, that beyond the alarming results of the audit report, she learned that the recruitment process for the Fall of 2003 was incomplete as of July 2003, so that number was at risk of dropping significantly.

The turnover in business and finance departments from that over the two years preceding her appointment, had become an issue placing the university in crisis. Inclusive in the management of the budget, she accepted a position at a university where staff had not gone to training for newly implemented state changes to the budget systems, and where money had been allocated to fill faculty positions, but faculty positions had not filled them. When she arrived only 69% of faculty had terminal or first-professional degrees.

### **The Transitional Period**

The first bounded timeframe explored in this study is that of the transition period from the time an official offer was made to serve as the chancellor/president and the first day of that position.

Dr. Bryan's period of transition was only 1 month. She was offered the position in June 2003, and she began in the role as chancellor of Fayetteville State University. The local paper made the announcement on June 19, 2003 and shows her in a front page photo walking into the student union on campus beside the outgoing president, who would be stepping down two weeks later (Thrasher, 2003a, p. A1). She is also shown later in the same article in a photo with Dr. McLeod, going chancellor, giving her a tour of the chancellor's office (Thrasher, 2003a p. A4).

Also during the transition period, she made an appointment to meet with the outgoing chancellor, who would still remain in the local area, and who, was return to a faculty role at FSU

(the latter did not take place as the outgoing chancellor took a professional position not associate with the university). During that appointment, they did discuss personnel matters. Bryan spoke specifically about her predecessor acknowledging that she would want to consider replacing the woman who was the executive over institutional advancement. While the interview did not reveal more extensive details, Dr. Bryan did replace her soon after she tenure began.

The Thrasher (2003a) article mentions key points of Bryan's three-year contract. What is not mentioned however, is that part of the transition period included Bryan waiting to receive the written contract because of internal negotiation, among the Board of Governors, regarding whether to offer an actual contract or not. Both Bryan and another woman were both being offered positions at one of the UNC system institutions, making both she and the other non-African-American women, the first women to lead at those respective institutions, and the system president, Molly Broad, was pushing for both women to have written contracts. Chancellors being offered written contracts was not typical in the UNC system.

I was hired when Molly Broad was president of UNC system...When I was hired, a woman [another woman as hired at the same time for another UNC System School]. I would not have come to Fayetteville had I not been offered a contract...I was under the impression that all chancellors got contracts...I had never worked in a system in which chancellors did not have contracts...This shows you how naïve I was [about North Carolina]...I believe Molly Broad wanted the chancellors universally to have contracts and it's my belief, it may not be true, that the might have been a nail in the coffin because North Carolina is a right to work state...These defined agreements were...not part of the work culture...[So] I kept thinking what's taking so long [to get me my contract].



Bryan further shares about a particular board member who lobbied on her behalf, in addition to Molly Broad:

President Broad was trying to persuade that board to provide this other woman and me with contracts. Now the other woman at...was given a contract, and there was black member of the board who said, "I know you're not going to bring in this black woman and ask her to come without a contract when you just gave this white woman a contract...This person was a supporter when I came to North Carolina...[until] he stepped down...because his wife was ill.

The public announcement about Dr. Bryan's appointment, during that transition period also include not only the mention of her being the first woman chancellor to lead FSU, but also of her being the first *black* woman chancellor in the university system (Thrasher, 2003a). In her article, Thrasher (2003a) quotes board member W. T. Brown "We have proven that when there is a qualified persona, regardless of race or gender, in this day and age they have opportunities. From all I can read and hear, she is highly qualified" (Thrasher, 2003a, p. A4).

Another matter that occurred during the transition, was the realization that she would have to live in a hotel. While contract benefits including the no-negotiable requirement to live in the FSU chancellor's residence, it was being prepared for renovation or to be sold by a team Molly Broad had put together. Bryan says she did not want to be involved with any projects related to a chancellor's residence.

"I don't know of very many presidents or chancellors who survived being associated with a residence...people think [a chancellor's residence] is an unnecessary expense [for the university]".

In an unrelated session, similar comments were made in a March 2016 professional women's leadership series at North Carolina Central University featuring the late NCCU Chancellor Debra Saunders White, Dorothy Cowser Yancy and Dianne Boardley Suber (the latter two who are also included in this study). In the March 26, 2016 session Dr. Yancy told the professional women gathered never to move into a residency at a university if there's an option not to, and to always maintain their own separate home even if you do. She also shared stories of her having warned a previous NCCU chancellor about spending resources on a residency. She discussed how the current NCCU Chancellor's Residence, which also was the location of the session came to be (D. Yancy, personal communication, March 26, 2016). When Bryan first began, she did not live on campus, nor in the chancellor's residence, Bryan was in a hotel.

Dr. Bryan discussed having to have waited a long period of time between her initial RDU airport interview and the second interview which occurred in Chapel Hill at the UNC system site- not on campus. In response to the question, "what was your preparation like after accepting the position/what did you do/what was done for you?", her response revealed little differentiation between the time just before the interview (which took place late spring 2003) and beginning July 1, 2003:

I'm the typical high-achieving student. Before I even when to the interviews, I learned everything I could about Fayetteville State.... I read every newspaper article I could find...I looked at all of the reports. I went to the website and I just read everything I could. I looked at the system office reports and read everything I could so there was virtually [nothing written I could find] that I did not read to learn about FSU...I had asked people I knew...people I knew from Coppin [State University] whom I knew might know something about the institution, so I got information from them. I did a lot of

reading, and I talked to my sister too. My sister, at the time, was the chancellor of a community college.

She discussed talking to the people at the UNC system office about the business operations (as suggested in an aforementioned conversation with her sister) at FSU, and she looked at previous audit reports.

In the transition she had also applied for, and been accepted to, the Harvard Seminar for New Presidents. The Harvard Seminar, actually took place during the early part of July, so for a whole week, in her first 100 days, Dr. Bryan was away; she was not at FSU in North Carolina.

### **First 100 Days**

Dr. Bryan's first 100 days were spent largely on a few major factors as it relates to the stability and success of a university: university financial and business operations, faculty recruitment and enrollment. Additionally, she focused on collecting baseline data in order to be able to accurately measure program and process improvements related to programs and processes implemented under her leadership.

In Bryan's first week of her first 100 days, news about the audit financial findings on the fiscal year that ended on June 30.

My first week or so I was away. I was at Harvard...and the news had come about the audit and I learned there was no on campus [to]really deal with those findings...I'm there at Harvard trying to pay attention and then I learn that nobody at Fayetteville was capable of doing the necessary work. What I found out was that the government accounting standards had changed and the people at Fayetteville State had not gone to training.

The audit noted two reportable areas of concern bookkeeping and inventory procedures (Thrasher, 2003b). Bryan had to enlist the support of the UNC system president and she was able

to get a consultant to go to FSU to begin address the findings. Upon her return, Bryan met with the Vice Chancellor of Business and Finance and, along with the consultant, determined the Vice Chancellor was incapable of fixing the issues. So, in the first month, Bryan terminated her VC of Business and Finance. She operated the school with an interim, as the consultant had agreed to stay. She also had to deal with an immediate issue for unpaid wages to faculty that had been teaching summer school. She learned, through an article in the paper, that someone in the business office not paid summer faculty in accordance with the scheduled pay cycle, and had decided to pay them on another day. There was also an issue with the way in which financial aid was being managed from a customer service perspective but also, in terms of efficiencies in the distribution of financial aid checks to students.

When I first came to Fayetteville State, the first week I was there, there was an article about how students at Fayetteville State were complaining about financial aid...faculty were complaining because they were supposed to get paid for summer school on a certain day...and a fairly low level staff person had decided checks would come out another day...I was away at Harvard when this all came out....

As a result, Bryan felt it important to lay out her expectations right away, in terms of service and student interactions.

[At] one of my first [staff meetings] my message was ‘we’re here to serve students which means that we need to respect them and treat them well’...I will never forget I noticed students standing in line for financial aid, those long lines and I [had to say] ‘you know students are in line, so we’re going to provide them with cold water’...it sounds like a small thing [but I had to make that suggestion]...[I also didn’t understand why they waiting to give students financial aid checks] because actually data suggested that if they

got checks early, they did not take the money and disappear. I had people who became angry with me because I said that we need to get the checks to students more quickly...[and] that's just not how we do things.

Based on student feedback, it appeared that anecdotally, that message was received by staff and being felt by students on campus.

This year also marks the first homecoming for FSU's new chancellor, T.J. Bryan, who started work July 1. As Bryan led the parade with the title of grand marshal, several people in the crowd and waving from floats said her leadership has bolstered school pride and brought about noticeable improvements. The spirit is out there more this year, said FSU sophomore Latanza McCoy, who rode on a float (Leclercq, 2003, para. 6).

Students satisfaction was not the only early hurdle. Student enrollment for fall 2003 was also at concern. She discovered applications for admission that had not been processed.

There was a scare about enrollment. I didn't know this, but the person who'd been hired to be in charge of admissions had ...all these applications...in boxes, and nothing had happened with them. We find out at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour that we not going to have an enrollment. That's when I did the recruitment tour. I think I must have gone to about twenty places.

She personally went around to areas where recruitment had been successful in the past, where she had networks, she employed faculty and staff to do the same at their churches and area churches, and organizations to which they held membership to ensure a strong enrollment for the Fall semester. Bryan did so even beyond scrutiny of her peers:

One of my colleagues, a person at the same level as I said “That’s not what a chancellor ought to be doing. Chancellors don’t recruit”. I’m thinking I will do whatever I need to do in order to keep this place functioning.”

According to official documents from the university archives, her initial recruitment tour was successful. The FSU 2003-2004 Annual Report notes that “ FSU experienced record enrollment in fall 2003 semester...with 48 additional new freshmen over last year’s numbers for a total of 798...with overall enrollment [5,329] up .4% from the year before” (Unknown, 2004, p. 4).

The bookkeeping issues also became apparent as the season was underway for athletics. Early in her tenure she realized there were little to no procedures in place for managing monies related to athletics in terms of sporting events. Some of the issues seemed to be a residual of the limited services provided under the former Shaw Food contract. According to Bryan,

They had no controls over the athletic money coming in. Anybody could have taken them money, like the receipts from games. We had to clean that up. They had people who were selling food at the games, a booster group. Liabilities all over the place. [The money from booster sales was supposed to be used] for scholarships or something, but [before what I discovered was individuals were] using the money in the athletics program. They got angry with me because I told them they couldn’t do it. I had Aramark do [food concessions because concessions are part of Aramark’s business

The existing contract with Aramark became a point of contention between Bryan and certain factions in the community because she was not as easily swayed as a few prominent black males in power had hoped she would be.

Bryan also was met immediately with two significant challenges in academic affairs. One was in the hiring of faculty, and the other was the competitiveness of program offerings. Dr.

Bryan indicates that her leader at the system level candidly expressed her disappointment in FSU, as it had been allocated a significant amount of financial resources for faculty salaries, yet there were several unfilled faculty positions. Broad's tenure within the UNC system was credited with system-wide enrollment increases (Diverse Staff Reporter, 2008, para. 4). "Fayetteville State wasn't creating any new academic programs. The impetus during Molly's time was enrollment growth, so we had money to grow enrollment". Bryan worked to get the positions filled during the first year, but during the first 100 days she began meeting with faculty about "working on academic programs, and ... accreditation; and about beginning to administer instruments so that I would have a baseline of what were the most important accomplishments." In a 2005 article, Yates shares a quote from FSU board chair, Nathan T. Garrett, where he acknowledges Bryan's intellect and self-motivation. He had this to say about Bryan's first agenda upon starting the job, "She realized very early that in order to grow and compete, we needed to embrace new programs. She went at this aggressively" (Yates, 2005, para. 8).

Of the things Dr. Bryan encountered and could have anticipated having to manage and learn in her first 100 days, given her 20 plus years of education at an HBCU, and her increasing levels of leadership experiences in both Maryland and the Pennsylvania higher education systems, the influence and relationship with the local news media was not one. However, as aforementioned, much that she learned about the anticipated matters in her first few months, she in fact learned from the media – not directly from her team. By making comparisons to her experience at one of two HBCUs in the major city of Baltimore, she had not had experiences where an HBCU garnered as much interest for a newspaper to print articles pointing out issues, when there were several other competing matters in the city. "Of course newspapers will print stories that sell papers. Unfortunately, in Fayetteville what I found is there was no greater

consumer of bad news about Fayetteville State than the black people who lived in Fayetteville.” Emphasizing the point, earlier in the data results, Dr. Bryan disclosed she was unaware of the year-end audit results until she had officially begun and was at a seminar at Harvard, however, she makes this point about the local paper, “One of the newspapers, right after I was announced, printed a cartoon of me coming into an office at Fayetteville State and encountering all these audit findings.” As a way to combat this issue, and give employees and students a more effective way to communicate that would not compromise the university, she began what she called Listening Tours on campus. Bryan conducted these tours by going to every department and unit on campus. She would listen to concerns on one condition- for each negative comment or complaint, people had to share two positive experiences or attributes about FSU.

I went to departments and I the first department I went to was actually one of the facilities departments because I wanted to make a statement that we’re all important to the success of the university... [I also implemented a comment card customer service feedback program] ...People were angry with me about that because they said “She only listens to students”. That wasn’t true...we [did] collect the cards...then somebody in research would ...compile evaluations...If there was a problem in a unit, we would pass them onto the leader of that unit.

Another prompt for the Listening Tours was her receipt of anonymous letters from people who had issues with things at the university. Bryan remembers going to campus and spending whole days on campus, only to return to the hotel, and hotel staff handing her envelopes for her with “unsigned” letters. She learned the local newspaper would also print articles based on accounts that may or may not have been verified, based on unsigned letters or anonymous calls to the paper – by faculty and staff.



During the interview, Dr. Bryan repeatedly spoke about being a faculty member at heart, the importance of data, and the necessity to be able to establish Fayetteville State University as a high-quality institution particularly where academic program offerings were concerned. During her first 100 days, she had campus quality and other surveys administered so she would have a baseline for progress. Subsequently, she acknowledged that throughout her tenure, those surveys were conducted annually.

The local and national newspapers touted Bryan for being the right person for FSU at the time she accepted the position (Thrasher, 2003b; Yates, 2005). When asked about some of the milestones in her first year, or pivotal moments during her tenure her response spoke volumes.

I didn't know it at the time, but I sowed the seed for my own end because I wanted new programs at Fayetteville State...One of the programs I really wanted was the four-year nursing program”.

One of the most notable early accomplishments in her tenure, the approval of a four-year nursing program, she believes may have been the very thing turned out to be her downfall.

### **The Last 100 Days**

Dr. Bryan's tenure was a four-year tenure, marked with several accomplishments that seem to have raised the profile of FSU. She had “quadrupled enrollment in distance-education courses, catapulting FSU into the 3<sup>rd</sup> place in distance-education across the 16-member UNC system”. She had established dual-enrollment with 14 community colleges spread throughout North Carolina. The University had become an international institution with partnership campuses in Shanghai and Mongolia. Faculty positions were filled with 93% of faculty holding doctoral or first-professional degrees. She had significantly increased fundraising from \$952,364 to \$1,725,404 and grants from \$4,729,213 to \$11,335,271 during the 4 years of her tenure (2003-

2004 Annual Report; 2005-2006 Annual Report; personal documents presented on November 12, 2016). Johnson (2007b) reveals FSU fundraising efforts had seen the highest level of success under Bryan's leadership inclusive of the successful completion of a capital campaign to raise \$1.5 million in three months. That campaign concluded during what would be Bryan's last 100 days "not only [meeting] the goal, [but] exceeding it by 15%" (Johnson, 2007b, para. 27). Bryan was also raised the number of non-African Americans in the state attending FSU, and it making it a true inter-city competitor of Methodist University. It also competed for black students with UNC Pembroke, the university with which the initial nursing relationship was formed, and had proven successful.

In order to properly document the information gathered about what Dr. Bryan notes as the beginning of the end of her tenure as FSU's first woman president, I have included her statements related her expectation of the success for the program. The nursing program's approval was considered complete as of the 2003-2004 annual report. Students in fall 2004 were able to declare nursing as a major with accounts that the program began in 2005, and the program had perfunctory success in that there was an existing template for the program already in place at FSU soon after her arrival.

The RN to BSN program just requires students to complete the general education courses and other courses they need because they already have their licenses...That's what Fayetteville State had been doing with Pembroke. They took a couple other courses that were nursing related... [but they] already had their licenses and...the measure of success of a nursing program is the licensure...Coppin [State University, where I was on faculty and in administration for 20 years] had a four-year nursing program. It was very successful. Bowie (MD) State had a successful nursing program. I made an assumption

that if these HBCUs could have high quality nursing programs, Fayetteville State could do the same thing. I was wrong.

Dr. Bryan confirms that her push for the program resulted in it being approved and accredited, and the completion of hiring of staff including a program director. As chancellor she says “I was doing a zillion things...did not have my finger on all [the] stuff [such as day to day matters of each individual academic department. I was fundraising, and doing speaking engagements to generate a buzz and raise the profile of the school]. However, according to her retelling of the story, she was aware that there was some contention among faculty, which did not bode well with some students who were also unsatisfied with the responses of faculty and seeming inconsistency in the support offered to nursing students. She acknowledges that after a year, FSU brought in a new department chair from outside the institution.

Bryan was growing the brand of “Fayetteville State” which would make it more of a political challenge in terms of brand and brand loyalty, to change the name of the school to UNC Fayetteville, which was a lingering issue during the resignation of her predecessor. In the last 100 days, she discusses two issues that were used to support her resignation. News accounts assess as her downfall, the failure of that initial class meeting the requirements of graduation from the nursing program facilitated a request for her resignation (Fain, 2007; Johnson, 2007a). Dr. Bryan contends the issues with the nursing program and the findings of the most recent audit provided the UNC Board of Governor a rationale for ending her tenure.

Leading up to the May 2007 graduation it was discovered that 24 out of 31 nursing students had not passed a course that was determined to have been a gateway course, and therefore would not graduate from the nursing program. Upon review, the FSU nursing program

was placed on probation, and charged with making the necessary corrections, as the course was not in alignment with state standards.

The program had been in place for maybe a year or two and the students [had made complaints and had concerns]. We had brought in another department chair...she had been accustomed to using course as a gatekeeper. You couldn't do certain things without passing a specific course. I think you could not take the nursing exam without passing this [certain] course...Which probably flew in the state where she'd come from...The North Carolina Nursing Board wouldn't allow that...there were all kinds of problems with that.

During that time, according to Bryan and the local news, some students hired an attorney because they were not being allowed to walk across the stage during the May 2007 graduation (Johnson, 2007b). While that was matter of concern, that matter was resolved as of June 2007, via a settlement and the students were allowed to retake the exam, with the knowledge and approval of the UNC Board of Governors.

In response to the interview question, "Think about your last 100 days. What was different or the same about your experience?", her response almost mirrored a response about her first 100 days, "the findings of the state financial audit".

We got a lot of bad press [about the nursing student issue and their suing the institution], but I could have survived that one problem...I kept in pretty close touch with the Vice President for Business and Finance. She told me that she was expecting that we were going to have an audit with no findings. Come to find out we have all these findings. I could not survive two things.

In the recounting of the series of events throughout her tenure, in which she had stabilized the financial issues in terms of policies and personnel, she acknowledged that she had continuously found difficulty in attracting and hiring a person who would be considered extremely qualified to take the lead role in that department. Staffing hires recommended from the state had been made, and upon discovery of the conditions and requirements for correction, those professionals had resigned (Johnson, 2007a; November 12, 2016). The person at the end of Dr. Bryan's tenure, had been there all four years, and she purports to her level of trust with that person and their ability to perform the necessary tasks. That woman, announced her resignation shortly after Bryan's, effective July 31<sup>st</sup>. Bryan's resignation was effective July 23, 2007.

Through the narrative, Dr. Bryan reveals that she had addressed the issue of the nursing students. At the time of her resignation, 19 of the 24 students had completed a 96-hour training and passed the requirements for graduation. During the time the state audit findings were reported, she was beginning to work on resolving the issue. She was not under the impression that her tenure was coming to an end. The school's enrollment was up, and had been rising.

In her previous experiences, including as a bystander aware of similar issues facing colleagues across the state, the type of audit findings which existed with FSUs finances, previously were not cause for termination or resignation.

I was told we would have time to deal with the audit issues...I was told that so I was getting ready to deal with that and I talked to somebody who was going to help me out and all of the sudden you don't have time...Faculty, specialized accreditation, distance education, recruiting a diverse student population...I was on the verge of getting big bucks from Mr. Belk when I got canned. I had seen him several times, and he liked me,

and he'd taken us out to lunch. You name it. We did so many things that were forward thinking... Then kaput.

In Dr. Bryan's retelling, the data shared, and retrieved from secondary sources create a chronological series of events that occurred in the 100 days leading to her last day – July 31<sup>st</sup>. However, it's important to note that in her perception, she did not have 100 'last days' as chancellor of FSU; she had about 3 weeks. In her perception, the issues around those few nursing students not being permitted to march in graduation in May, was problematic but "at that time I wasn't under any threat of losing my position". The findings of the audit were surprising. Where she'd worked before, other states, "chancellors aren't let go or presidents aren't let go because of audit findings. I think North Carolina is sort of unique in that." She went on to disclose findings reported under two colleagues with whom she worked in Maryland, one who remained president after an audit with almost 20 findings. She spoke of that president's subsequent appointment to a chancellorship in North Carolina. Bryan contended this experience where "in other places [the response having been] "Okay, well you know, just fix it", further affirmed her sense of her position still being secure.

In her addendum to the initial study interview Bryan shares that shortly after the May 2007 nursing student/graduation issue, she received an email from the UNC General Administration indicating that FSU was in audit trouble. It demanded her immediate attention to the matter. "Shortly after I received the email about the *possibility* of a qualified audit, representatives from the State Auditor's office came to campus to help me". According to Johnson (2007a), UNC System President Erskine Bowles came to Fayetteville State on July 3 to discuss with Bryan issues of the 2006 state audit. Also present in that meeting were the UNC system Chief of Staff, the chairman of FSU's board of trustees, vice chancellor and associate

vice chancellor for business and finance. Banner is a student information management system used in higher education. As discovered early in her tenure, the business operations staff had not attended the necessary training to properly use Banner for its record keeping applications. While the staff had subsequently been to training, there were issues with the technology itself, but also in the continued mastery of use among the appropriate staff. It was upon further discovery and during her attempts to correct the issues raised in the last 100 days, that Bryan learned the complexity of the issues. Johnson's (2007b) article in the *Fayetteville Observer* provided support to Bryan's recollection that she was unaware of the magnitude of the issues with Banner (the UNC system's computer management system), and her contention that her team had assured her there would be no major findings with the audit. In this meeting Bryan's board chair supporter her ability to make immediate corrections. On Friday, July 6, 2007, T. J. Bryan had a meeting with the UNC Board of Governors, led by UNC system President Erskine Bowles. Bryan did not confirm in her interview or subsequent document a specific meeting, but did say this: "When I learned that the [Banner] system had not been implemented correctly, I talked to the UNC President, who gave me 60 days to deal with the problem. Then almost overnight he changed his mind. He told me I was out. Please note that the audit report on which be based my termination was *not* (her italics for emphasis) completed until months after my ouster".

In her final three weeks, she went to work each day. She maintained her calendar. She did make calls to those groups for whom she has commitments to speak as the Chancellor of FSU and informed them that she would no longer be able to speak. She had her staff continue with outstanding projects which included resurfacing of the FSU football field. According to newspaper reports, there were those in the external environment, and perhaps within the campus community who may have be content with the decision, there were those who were displeased

with the forced resignation of the first board appointed woman chancellor of Fayetteville State University.

The Student Government Association wrote something to the papers. Students wrote to people they thought might help. Faculty wrote letters. Faculty started a petition...because they did not want me to leave...There was a [farewell event] for me [orchestrated by] the Student Government Association and Alumni Association.

According to Johnson (2007a) external community supporters and university employee supporters contacted the NC State Senator, Tony Rand, to lobby on Bryan's behalf. Johnson's account was that the day Bryan met traveled to Chapel Hill, called Rand's office repeatedly, because Rand had been a supporter in the past. The news article indicates Rand could not be reached.

### **Pivotal Moments**

The results of the narrative inquiry revealed that there were several accomplishments and milestone experiences during the 4-year tenure of T. J. Bryan. Those experiences were categorized as pivotal moments. As anticipated, those moments did not all occur during the time-bound periods of the study. In order to assess weight of importance of those moments solely to the lived experience of the participant, the results (milestones, then pivotal moments) were entirely based on Dr. Bryan's responses.

One of the milestones of her tenure was the growth of FSUs online education. She indicated it was in large part a way to increase enrollment and better serve FSU's non-traditional student population. Post the initial interview, Dr. Bryan shared a little known milestone which was her very significant role in saving the Ft. Bragg (the largest U.S. Army installation in the country) programs:



The university was going to be thrown off the base because the director of the program did not convert to the military's revised way of handling enrollment. At the time I served on a commission at the American Council on Education, and a member with responsibility for education of military-service members telephoned me...My national reputation saved FSU.

Bryan's milestones mirror the noted impact her vision had on enrollment. She had a series of milestones around targeted recruitment that included strategic recruitment of Hispanic students, and developed an initiative for non-traditional students.

I hired Spanish-speaking admissions counselor; Made sure services were available when the [older students] were available.

As was the case with each woman interviewed, Dr. Bryan noted SACS-related milestones. For her, the accomplishments were very specific, and perhaps represented a milestone some foreshadowing of a pivotal moment. She was successful in leading the charge of Achieving specialized accreditation for "every field in which it was possible" including business, computer science and nursing, in an effort to prove the quality of the programs offered at FSU:

When I told someone what I had [accomplished], this person- a white male said, 'you went down there and upset the apple cart...if you did this [inclusive of the international academic programs] you're upsetting the balance of things'.

Bryan was all about data collection, her last milestone shared during the interview as about the results of campus quality survey:

Surveys were done every year. Results indicated that people were happier under my leadership than they had been before I came.

Molly Broad would even tell her to send the results to silence those non-supporters.

Just as her narrative revealed succinct milestones of note accomplishments, she was clear about her pivotal moments as well. Those were her commitment to honor the Aramark contract:

I was under a lot of pressure, as soon as I arrived to open [the dining services] contract up for competition as soon as it was legally possible...I think people thought I would be malleable and that they could persuade me...once it was determined I wasn't...people who had been my supporters the first 100 days were not my supporters any longer...Senator Shaw sent negative letters to Molly Broad about me; she told me about them.

She spoke throughout the interview about the support of UNC system president Molly Broad, and as discussed during her transition period the role that board member advocacy had on her initial wins. Therefore, a pivotal moment that occurred early in her short tenure - the departure of board member W. T. Brown, who had pushed for her to have a contract, left during her first year in the position.

He said things when he was leaving about me...I don't think the intention was to harm me...but it was interpreted as him not supporting me...it gave the Fayetteville Observer permission to write negative things about me.

It was no surprise to the researcher when Dr. Bryan indicated her belief that the greatest pivotal moment for her at FSU was not directly related to her work at FSU, but was the departure of Molly Broad as UNC system president.

Dr. Bryan acknowledged "my enemies had no credibility with Molly, but they had credibility with her successor." This reference included the efforts previously mentioned regarding the senator whose wife was chief executive for the dining services contract lost under Bryan's predecessor. Under the narrative of her last 100 days, Bryan details two significant

activities to which the end of tenure is attributed – publicly. However, Bryan believes that end of her tenure was much less to do with the results of these two matters, and more the carrying out of a larger plan to replace her and remove any lasting connections to Molly Broad. Molly Broad announced her retirement in 2005, to occur by the end of 2006, two and ½ years into Bryan’s chancellorship. She hired Bryan, she pushed for Bryan and another first woman chancellor in the system to have employment contracts. Broad had always been a supporter of Bryan, and Bryan’s accomplishment coincided with the accomplishments of raising enrollment, across the state’s system schools, associated with Broad’s presidency (Yates, 2005). And without Broad’s support, Bryan’s chancellorship was at its end.

**Dr. Dianne Boardley Suber: First Woman President of Saint Augustine’s University (SAU)**

Dianne Boardley Suber, who acknowledges the significance on her career path, of growing up on the campus of Florida A & M University as the daughter of two FAMU professors received her undergraduate degree from Hampton (Institute) University in Early Childhood Education in 1971. After teaching for a one year in Greensboro, North Carolina, she went on to complete her Master of Education in Curriculum Development from the University of Illinois, Urbana/Champaign. After teaching kindergarten for a few years, she spent the majority of her career (almost 20 years) as an elementary school principal before transitioning to higher education administration. During her time as a principal, she also had a weekly article as a freelance writer for the *Journal and Guide Newspaper*. She earned her terminal degree in Education Administration from Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech) in 1996. She served in increasing levels of administration at Hampton University for seven years. She was selected to for the presidency at Saint Augustine’s while serving as Hampton’s Vice President for Administrative Services.

As of the time of our interview, Dr. Suber has been retired from the presidency for two and one half year. She had not taken another full-time position but rather was enjoying retirement. She had moved sold her home in Raleigh, North Carolina, and our interview was held, on October 16, 2016, in a newly purchased home in the city for which she had called home for the majority of her young and not-so-young adult life- Hampton, Virginia. She was just returning from the final meeting of the White House Initiative on HBCUs Advisory Board under President Barak Obama, where she had been recognized as one of two longest standing members. Suber serve under both of Georg W. Bush’s terms, and under both of Obama’s terms, an appointment that was made soon after assuming the role as President of Saint Augustine’s University. In her vibrantly appointed great room, we conduct the interview among original art work by renowned visual artist Synthia Saint James, which includes a piece whereby an image of Dr. Suber is standing in her presidential regalia amidst a sea of students depicted by varying shades of color.

### **What She Walked Into – A School in Crisis**

Saint Augustine’s University is located in Raleigh, North Carolina. Saint Augustine’s (College) University is one of North Carolina’s five existing private historically black universities, and one of 33 private or independent colleges or universities in the state. There were six private HBCUs in -the state (another private HBCU lost its accreditation in 2004, and announced a temporary closing in 2016). It was founded in 1867, and has an affiliation with the Episcopal Church. Until recent years, it was one of three HBCUs established by the Episcopal Church that remained in operations, with the other two located in South Carolina (Voorhees College) and Virginia (St. Paul’s College, which closed its doors in 2014). Among its early faculty was Reverend Henry Delany whose “whose daughters Bessie and Sadie, as centenarians,

recounted their childhood days on campus in the national bestseller *Having Our Say*". The university's library has a whole area dedicated to the significance and life of the Delany family at Saint Augustine's College. Renown educator and pioneer black feminist, Anna Julia Cooper, whose words about freedom have been immortalized inside the cover of every U.S. passport- the only quote by a woman or African-American on the current passport, completed her early education at Saint Augustine's as one of its earliest graduates, and one of its first teachers. On its campus are two historic landmarks – St. Agnes Hospital which was the only hospital that served blacks from Virginia to Atlanta until the 1961, and also was home to the only nursing school for blacks during that same time period. It also has on its campus the Historic Chapel, which is said to have been built by the students of the campus and was considered one of the first two buildings (Altman, 1997). While the campus is located just north of a historic section of the city of Raleigh, which is the capital city in North Carolina, it is often attributed with being at the center of two of Raleigh's predominately black neighborhoods – Idlewild and College Park. The campus is flanked by those neighborhoods, but also by Raleigh's oldest cemetery- Historic Oakwood Cemetery which served the final resting place the areas confederate dead.

Saint Augustine's University is a co-educational institution that began as a normal school, with some trade school's emphasis that grew to what is considered a liberal arts institution. The college had a series of early name changes in its evolution, including Saint Augustine's College – a name it retained from 1932 through 2012. Saint Augustine's College gained university status in 2012 under the leadership of Dr. Dianne Boardley Suber.

Dianne Boardley Suber first interviewed for the position as president of Saint Augustine's College in May 1999. If selected, she would become the first woman president in the then 132-year old college's history. The previous president had served for only 4 years - a

tenure the local paper described as “stormy...he came with an agenda to raise academic standards and make radical changes” (Lee, 1999, pp. 1A & 4A). That short-tenured president had followed a long-standing president who had lead the college for 27 years. According to Lee (1999) and other documents provided by Suber, at the time, Saint Augustine’s had about 1,600 students which had not been a consistent number. Saint Augustine’s College would have been considered a school in crisis.

The next president will have a tough job ahead. St. Aug’s, which has about 1,600 students, has struggled in recent years with dropping enrollment, financial instability and poor graduation rates. [As a result of Franklin’s leadership, which came after the board asked Robinson to retire] [t]he campus became deeply split over its very mission...We are looking for someone with vision who understands the value of HBCUs...who is going to be able to pull the different factions of the college together and move us beyond 2000, said trustee and chairman of the search committee] William Mossett (Lee, 1999, p. 4A).

Painting a broader picture of the financial instability, an article published in October 1999 listed Saint Augustine’s College as having one of the worst student loan default rates in the state. According to the article in the *Winston-Salem Journal* “the default rate for students at several North Carolina universities, colleges, community colleges and trade schools was greater than the national average. The worst in North Carolina was Barber-Scotia College in Concord with a 33% default rate. Students at Saint Augustine's College, Shaw University, Livingstone College and Fayetteville State University defaulted at rates of 20% or greater” (AP, 2014; Carter, 2016, p. B02). There was also poor record keeping, which resulted in a finding under Southern Association Colleges and Schools (SACS) review reported in 2002 (Yates, 2002, para 4). In her

own words, Suber says “What I found was an institution that was very different from the institution I had left...I found...policies that were very loosely defined and there were more practices than policies”. Suber continued, “...the institution was in significant debt especially with cash flow which did not show up on audits”.

Saint Augustine’s was largely staffed with professionals and para-professionals who only had bachelor degrees. There were limited faculty who had master degrees, and very few faculty with terminal degrees. “Prior to my coming [to St. Aug, the current administrative team] had determined that 13 of the faculty members did not meet the standards of accreditation in terms of teaching in their own areas...”. Upon Suber’s arrival, the school was also one year away from SACS reaffirmation.

### **The Transitional Period**

Prior to coming to SAU, Suber served as Assistant Vice President at Hampton University in Hampton, VA where among other things, she had senior oversight of administrative services such as admissions, financial aid and the university registrar. During the interview Dr. Suber indicated that part of her transition preparation began prior to her submitting her name for consideration for the position. She and two colleagues drove down to Raleigh, and spent a day on campus posing as parents of potential students visiting the school and different support services departments. She says on the way back they planned and envisioned what SAU at that time could be.

The announcement of Suber’s appointment was made in October 1999. However, she did not officially begin until December 1999. In fact, she had her official welcome to campus in December 1, 1999 just prior to the winter break, and therefore she did not actually move until

and assume full responsibility until January of 2000. When asked about the transition period she shared this:

...for the most part in that first...45 days or so that existed between the announcement and my actual going to campus, a lot of it was just the preparation of making the move. I owned a home in Hampton. I needed to find someplace to live in Raleigh [as Saint Augustine's does not have a president's residence]. There was an appointed person to help try to negotiate through all of that, so some of it was just the logistics of making the move...I [also] selected the car I wanted from the college.

Dr. Suber discussed the need to prepare her current institution for her departure.

I obviously did the things that I needed to do in terms of leaving the job where I was. I had a conference with the president [of my current institution]. I let him know I had been selected. Actually we had a "Dianne these are the kinds of things you should look for to do first" ...conversation.

The data collection for this interview was not the first time I interviewed Dr. Suber about her experiences at Saint Augustine's. In previous interview related to leadership, Dr. Suber has indicated the level of respect she has for the guidance of her then-president, Dr. William Harvey (D. Suber, personal communication, October 1, 2012). Both she and the late Dr. Debra Saunders-White acknowledge his coaching when they respectfully became the presidents of SAU and North Carolina Central University, respectively. During the narrative for this study, Suber demonstrates how his advice to her was different in her transition into the role at SAU than that which he has been known to give.

...One of the things that Dr. Harvey and I talked about was whether I should take somebody with me. He has a philosophy that you don't leave an institution and rape the



institution of the personnel, but there was a person...that I have been working with in the provost's office. [She] and I were good friends, but we were also compatible administrators. He suggested that I might want to consider taking [her] with me. [Her] background was an attorney by trade...had gotten into higher education somewhat like I did, late. Came from the corporate world...and had worked at Hampton both in continuing education but more significantly in the provost's office...She agreed [to come with me].

In addition to holding a transition discussion with her own president, her transition period included communication with the Saint Augustine's board about the terms of her contract.

I had a conversation about the contract...about what the contract should be and what should be in the contract (see aforementioned assistance with housing and issuance of a university vehicle) ...[we] came to some agreement so I was interacting with select members of the board who had the responsibility for transitioning the new president.

The initial interviews for the position had been held in Greensboro, North Carolina. The search committee was made up of nine people inclusive of a student, faculty, staff and a community leader. In addition to the Greensboro interview, in August 1999 she toured the campus, as a finalist for the position. Other than that, coupled with the exploratory visit made early that spring, Suber had not met a lot of the campus. The same was true of her transition:

I didn't have an opportunity to meet particularly with anyone from the campus community other than the trustee who was responsible for the transition, and the person who was to have been my chief of staff...then I actually didn't move to Raleigh...until January of 2000.

Finally, in terms of preparation for the new role, Suber said:

I thought I knew what Saint Augustine's looked like on paper... [based on my experience in K-12] and my 7 ½ years at Hampton... I thought I was going to happen was that I'd be in the same kind of situation with a new name and a new place.

Reflectively in retrospect, Dr. Suber says this finally about her transition period:

Candidly, I'm not sure that I knew what [my first 100 days] was going to look like in terms of transitioning.... I learned ...it was going to be a process where we were going to have to ensure that the institution was fiscally solvent, and that is met accreditation standards.

What she found out upon arrival, what the challenges those items were going to be.

### **First 100 Days**

When asked describe the experiences of her first 100 days, Suber noted a few distinct points of challenge or crisis: cash flow, academic credentials, accreditation readiness, recruitment, and facilities in need of repair, and board of trustee composition.

...The institution was struggling financially in contradiction to what I had seen on paper.

The audits had all said the institutions were solid and to that degree they had non-qualified audits. That part was true where the big hole was, was in cash flow... When I put my first paycheck into the bank for deposit, which was in my first 100 days, it bounced.

She said of that experience "that's when reality set in that this wasn't going to be a gravy train experience...". Suber had brought with her a trusted colleague from Hampton, as aforementioned in the transition, who was strong in policy development. Suber hired this colleague as the Executive Assistant to the President, but within the first year changed her title to Vice President of Administrative Services. This title was intentionally vague to allow the role to "which gave her some flexibility for us to define what the role was going to be". So the initial strategy was to

sit down to look at places where there needed to be a policy in place and to employ the assistance of a core team to help to move that agenda.

That first 100 days I had to sit down with [my Executive Assistant] and say “Okay. Let’s look at where our priorities are. Let’s look at how we’re going to get a handle on it. Let’s look at the policies that we need to put in place, and let’s see how we can...identify a core of faculty and staff who are amenable to working with the changes so we can at least get the institution back on financial track and put us in a position where we are ready for the accreditation team that following year”.

Another issue linking athletics and finances was the issue of tickets for the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association (CIAA) basketball tournament. Suber was familiar with the CIAA and the CIAA tournament, one of the most attended athletic conferences for HBCUs (CIAA, 2016)). The tournament is the culmination of the basketball season for the then 12-school conference, and was being hosted in Raleigh, North Carolina. The tournament typically takes place during the last week of February or the first full week of March and the 2000 tournament occurred during Suber’s first 100 days in the city in which her college operated. She discovered issues with the ticket “sales”. As background, Suber recognized early in her tenure that several of the staff and faculty were Saint Augustine’s graduates. Many were among those who held only a bachelor’s degree. She asked for latitude in sharing why her remedy to the discovery had an uncertain impact:

[I mentioned before] that prior to my coming, 13 faculty were [recommended for] termination...They didn’t announce it until I got there. The headlines said, “New president fires 13 faculty member” ...they released it the week of CIAA tournament.

What you had was all these alums and this headline...If you want notoriety or popularity

or whatever, it's the best time to put anything in the newspaper... [As for my discovery about CIAA tickets, I learned] historically, tickets were given to lots of people (Board members, local business men, alumni, etc.), with the college absorbing the cost. I restricted the number of comp tickets in order to set a mindset for spending justification.

OH-MY-GOD! The backlash... (D. Suber personal communication, December 29, 2016).

The costs for which Suber referenced "absorbing" in the quote above was later described as the college underwriting expenses of faculty and staff's to stay in hotel accommodation in the Raleigh during the CIAA tournaments contract in Raleigh, even though Raleigh was the same city in which faculty and staff lived and worked

Dr. Suber states one of the areas she had to deal with immediately was academic affairs as it related to accreditation preparation. More specifically, she had to deal with practices that had been put in place by the provost who was there when she arrived. What she did not learn during the interview process, nor during her transition, was that he had submitted an application during the early stages of the presidential search, but did not advance as a finalist, however the board had made him interim president (Lee, 1999, p. 1A). During the period he served as interim, before the board appointed trustee member Mel Miller to serve as Interim, the provost had developed policies that gave 'the provost' ultimate authority. "When I got to St. Aug, what I found was that almost all the policies, whether they were student affairs' policies, or ...business policies or whatever, started and stopped with him as the last word or the decision maker". The information shared about the provost's actions was significant. Suber says "his undermining and second guessing consumed a great deal of energy and effort. The strategy to limit his authority in the middle of transition was difficult to develop without creating media coverage" (D. Suber, personal communication, December 29, 2016). Suber shared an example that ultimately resulted

in the provost's separation from the institution; the referenced separation occurring just outside of her first 100 days.

Eventually we ran into a situation where he made an arbitrary decision to fail about 16 or 17 seniors that were in a class which would've kept those kids from graduating. It was a math class, and his decision was that...they would fail and that this was from the [fall 1999] semester. When we looked at ... exactly what had occurred.... There were prerequisites for the course that they failed, that the students had not taken, had not been required to take. We were able to make a decision that because the institution had failed to meet its obligation to ensure that the students were prepared that we would pull those seniors, and we set up a separate section for just those seniors, where they could pass with a limited grade but that it would get them out of the system rather than fail 16 seniors who it was really our fault. It was a line that was drawn in the sand, and the provost indicated that if I went through with it, he would quit. I gave him a directive to follow, and on Monday, he did quit.

In her previous positions at Hampton University, she had lead the process of accreditation so she was well versed in said process and what schools needed to have in place in order to be reaffirmed. When asked about the milestones of her tenure, she specifically speaks of the milestones in that timeframe. Many of the actions taken were in order to prepare for the SACS accreditation, which was one year away. She lists the aforementioned matter with the provost, and the matter related to the 2000 CIAA basketball tournament cost containment. She also notes:

- Sending letters of termination to persons not certified to meet accreditation, and the hiring of new faculty considered “outside people”

- Termination of staff and faculty in cost cutting efforts in areas where the college was “overstaffed”. Many of these positions were held by alumni.
- Preparing a “real” budget for presentation to the Board for approval at the April meeting.

An article in the local paper, the *News and Observer* provided a synopsis that coincides with Suber’s recollection:

College President Dianne B. Suber, who was attending the Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association basketball tournament in Raleigh, declined Thursday to say how many of the private school's 90 faculty members had been told their jobs would end at the close of the spring semester. Logan Delany Jr., chairman of the historically black college's board of trustees, said he did not know the specifics of Suber's cuts. But he said St. Augustine's has not met its budget for several years. When Suber took charge as president in December, the trustees directed her to take the necessary steps to restore financial stability. Suber succeeded Bernard Franklin, whose turbulent four-year tenure ended in May when he left to become president of Virginia Union University. Delany said that when Suber addresses the trustees at their March 17 meeting, he wouldn't be surprised to hear her propose changes in operations and academic organization as well as in specific faculty positions (Simmons & Perez, 2000, para. 1).

Suber also notes as something she had to contend with during the beginning of her tenure was a “big battle with certain Board members who challenged whether I really ‘understood how things were done.’” The first board of trustee chairperson was the great nephew of the Delany Sisters whose historic affiliation was a strong point of pride for the College. Personally, other than the familial connection, that chair had very little affinity for HBCUs, having grown up in New York,

attending private primary schools and Ivy Leagues colleges (according to Suber, and a Bloomberg.com corporate profile). “He was an avid supporter of former president Prezell Robinson, whose retirement was forced by the Board after 28 years of service.” Her interview exposed that while there was a president between Suber and Robinson, she inherited not only faculty, and an alumni base who were still loyal to him, but also a board that “for the most part” remained loyal to him. Suber says in her first 100 days, he was “perfunctorily respectful.” He advised her that “[she couldn’t] fix it with the people who broke it”. However soon after she notes even that level of respect soon waned.

As alluded to above, in her first 100 days, Dr. Suber encountered a phenome of the media’s coverage of the college and the points of her transition as the new president.

I found that for the first period of time, I was garnering headlines that were negative. I had also never been in a situation where the media outlets took anonymous letters and people complaining, and printed it. There were a series of [articles based on] anonymous letters that [questioning who I was and challenging whomever as to] ‘who have they have brought to Raleigh to run this school].

An additional fact that posits support of the media contribution to the perception of others during Suber’s early tenure is the action taken by the provost when he quit:

What he did was he sent a letter to the newspaper indicating that I had arbitrarily changed grades so that these students could pass, and so the paper printed it without any verification. They apparently were not used to consulting with women about situations. I had that debacle to deal with as well.

Thus, just as in the case of Bryan, media involvement is an emergent theme.

## **The Last 100 Days**

Dr. Suber announced her retirement on April 4, 2014, effective on May 30, 2014, it was a Friday. In an email to her over the same weekend, her board chair informed her last day was to be April 4, 2014; a press conference was held on Monday, April 7 announcing an interim leader. Considering her last 100 days, data was collected and considered inclusive of activities occurring in December 2013. I asked a questions attempting to gather data comparing her first 100 days to her last, “What was different or the same about your experiences at [the point of your last 100 days]?”, Dr. Suber’s response was to first give some backstory:

...I was told once by a major player in Raleigh- a philanthropic leader, “When you can tell me why should I invest in St. Aug, then come back and we’ll talk about a fundraising initiative...Early in my tenure, when I first met him, I could not. [At the end of my tenure] I could literally could tell you: student graduate success, facilities, role in economic strength of Raleigh, unique academic programs, etc... Here's this institution that's fiscally solvent, that has a stable enrollment, that is garnering its place in higher education, where the president is on the White House ... President's White House advisory board, where the kids are doing well, where Fox is giving out scholarships to nobody but kids from St. Aug, and there's just a litany of things that show that this institution had moved from obscurity to really having a place in higher education where people noted it and where its faculty and staff were beginning to benefit from being employed by Saint Augustine's University. I think what happened was I got comfortable in, "Here's the success. Certainly this is enough for us to now move into some level of normalcy."... I thought that in this arena by adding to the board people who had some influence in the community would be an asset. In my recommendation, the board



appointed 3 white men actually that were ... One was a former mayor of the city that African Americans in that city held in high regard. Another was a president of the chamber of commerce, and another was a senior vice president in the largest woman owned real estate development firm in North Carolina. I thought these people would bring a great deal of influence and open up doors for Saint Augustine's.... I thought these men would bring that kind of entrée into the bigger society. What I didn't realize and I'm not sure that I had any way of realizing it was that there was a big ... There's a bigger plan for Raleigh... As I realized that the plans, the city plans, were to develop the southeast end of Raleigh and that what it began to look like was re-gentrification. I began to realize that people were buying up property in and around Saint Aug. The [former] little shot houses were suddenly beginning to have hanging signs of East Carolina and North Carolina State and University of North Carolina. I activated the community development corporation on campus, and we began to compete in terms of buying up properties around the campus in expectation that eventually the campus would want to expand... We put a really good plan on the table to purchase, to bid on [a neighboring] property [that had gone into default]. I got the Faulk Foundation to help sponsor that. We thought we had a good shot of getting that property which would guarantee that St Aug would own the property around itself so that for future expansion, that property would be there... All of this happened right up to probably these 100 days that you want me to talk about (D. Suber, personal communication, December 29, 2016).

It is Suber's belief that the similarities in the beginning and ending of her tenure both involved conflicting agendas between herself and her Board of Trustees, and competing or unexpected loyalty allegiances among her key staff. In the beginning of her tenure she had to contend with a

board chair who reportedly had been instrumental in the departure of her immediate predecessor, and had begun to use similar tactics against her. That board of 28 contained one woman, not including the president. However, at that point, which Suber noted was about 8 months into her tenure, there was enough support on the board to “stave off[his] efforts, that he resigned from the board at the end of 2000” (D. Suber, personal communication, December 29, 2016).

At the beginning of the academic year 2013-2014, the year into which the last 100-days fell, the St. Aug board had a shift in leadership. The person who had served as her chair during the 2012 initiative that lead to the name and status change to “university” was concluding his term as chair. He was an alum, but had been what Suber called “corporate educated, corporate raised.” She says of his support of the agreed upon long term strategic plan and Suber’s leadership, “he was if nothing else -fair. [If he did not agree he would caution and give rational]. Even when ...there was disagreement there was open communication.” The new chair seemed to have aligned himself, Suber believes, with the three new members of the board, which began to work against her agenda, and the approved long term strategic plan for the university. The 18-member board composition was different toward the end of her tenure than in the beginning. These three white men who were leaders in the city were part of the board, but there were also 5 women on the board, in addition to Suber as the president, including University of Pennsylvania professor and scholar, Marybeth Gasman, who was noted as one of the most influential academics in the US in *Education Week* in 2015 and a noted expert in HBCUs (Nealy, 2010). The professional backgrounds of the other women included executive leadership positions with some of the region’s or nation’s largest corporations, including one member who was senior vice president of a banking institution and well versed in financial management. Others had served on

other boards of trustees for other HBCUs in the recent past or consecutively. Each of these women Suber describes as “very knowledgeable, competent and supportive.”

Another similarity was a rising issue of cash flow. However, this issue was not just one facing Saint Augustine’s University, as the dominant culprit of the decline in cash flow was a direct result of a major shift in the federal Parent Plus Loan policy. The Office of Access and Success released a Fact Sheet on August 2013 about the impact the changes to the interpretation of Parent Plus loan eligibility had had on HBCUs. The data revealed what may be considered in pop culture a perfect storm:

- In 2011, The U.S. Department of Education added new underwriting standards for the PLUS loan program for parents and graduate students.
- The U.S. Department of Education did not convene a rule making panel or issue a letter to colleges explaining the change.
- The changes to the PLUS loans arose as HBCUs experienced a 5.1% budget cut via the sequester. (Lee & Keys, 2013, p. 1).

The Fact Sheet highlights the greater impact as such:

- 14,616 students at HBCUs learned that the U.S. Department of Education had rejected applications from the students’ parents or guardians for loans to help pay college expenses in the Fall of 2012.
- HBCUs lost an estimated \$168 million as a result of the large number of students who were not able to start or continue their college education (Lee & Keys, 2013, p. 1).

The bulleted item that mirrors Suber’s assessment of the impact on Saint Augustine’s was the timing of the changes. “In almost all of our institutions, we experienced a decline in enrollment. The decline came midyear. It was difficult to have planned for it, but it sent our budgets into

precarious situations and we were all working to try to close the gap. We're enrollment driven". Saint Augustine's University, as a private college, was 85% to 90% tuition driven (A. Haynes, personal communications, November 1, 2012). The reason the impact was delayed for St. Aug, was a result of pre-existing policies that had been put in place related to student accounts. "We had put in place a policy that indicated that in order to proceed to the next semester, you had to pay your back balance. That was 7-8 years old so our students did not start in a September [2012] with a deficit".

A point of pride for Suber as aforementioned, was raising the profile of Saint Augustine's, which in turn, raised and shifted the profile of the Saint Augustine's University student. The strategies put in place were also designed to build a student population with academic and financial stability. At the start of her tenure "93% of St. Aug students were students dependent on federal assistance, I had decreased that to 78%. That means a greater number of students who were able and willing to pay" (D. Suber, personal communication, August 5, 2013). The impact of declining enrollment reportedly, was visible to other similarly situated colleges in the Fall 2012 enrollment. It did not impact Saint Augustine's until Fall 2013, which made Saint Augustine's and Suber a target because it seemed to an outlier. The following are distinct efforts made to address the financial uncertainty:

- Convened a planning team of faculty and staff to address: attrition, personnel, and athletics. The team planned a phased adjustment over 6 months so no one department would have any greater impact than another.
- Secured a loan from the HBCU Capital finance because SAU was carrying 20 & 30-year debt at high interest rates; that financing reduced all rates from 9% to about 3%

- Negotiated with BB&T who found SAU credit worthy to refinance the remaining debt.
- Hired experienced Major Gift Officer (in Development) and a Director of Marketing Communications (in Development) in the Fall of 2013
- Approved January 22, 2014 recommendations from Academic Deans gained approval for recommendations to reconsider academic offerings, and support current student through degree completion in phased out majors.

This approved proposal also coincided with recommendations for minimal reductions in force across units. The expected cash flow for the next year (2014-2015 fiscal year) was to be close to \$360, 000 extra dollars. Each of these addressed the immediate issues. “We were set to be able to manage the cash flow for that first year. As I was able to negotiate these changes, these solutions...I noted that the activity of select board members became more aggressive toward me...very deliberate”).

Documentation provided by Dr. Suber post the initial interview reveal that on December 17, 2013, Dr. Suber submitted a written letter of complaint to her board chair that she was experiencing gender discrimination from select board members Experiences included undermining her role as president, making compromising and harassing statements publicly, and directly that were demeaning and disrespectful, among other macro and micro-aggressions, often times with disregard to Board policy and procedure. The chairman responded in February 2014 to her allegation, proposing that her concerns would be heard by the personnel committee within that same month, the personnel committee was chaired by one of the five women on the board.

There were five women on an 18-member board. Everyone had experience in higher education, in finance, and all were affirming the...direction the institution was moving

was the correct direction. They were on record. Board minutes reflect it...but the more support I seemed to get from this faction of the board, the more aggressive the other faction of the board was in undercutting my authority...At this point they had core staff members there were working with them.

Dr. Suber provided documentation supporting the board continuous, and increasingly hostile board activity. Suber provides documentation that one the white male members with support, professionally threatened the black woman finance committee chair, and called into question her credentials and experience, as she demonstrated support for Suber's plan and work to manage debt (D. Suber, personal communication, February 2014, and March 2014). Excerpts from email thread between Suber and Gasman (shared with her permission), are used to provide examples of general behavior of certain factions of the SAU Board of Trustees:

I am writing to let you know I am more than likely going to resign from the board. I am very uncomfortable with the things that are going on right now and all the behind the scenes things people are doing. I always act above board and tell people what I think to their faces; the SAU board doesn't operate that way. I serve on four boards, including another HBCU, and none of these things happen. I want to be supportive of you and will continue to, but I can't have my name attached to these kinds of things...what I've been dealing with as of late is just not appropriate. Instead of caring about students and educating them, far too many people care about politics and causing a lot of trouble...Just a lot of drama, emails, texts, etc. It is ...so inappropriate. I honestly think you should get out of there...can't make the next meeting, not enough notice for me...and I can reach out to [the woman personnel committee chair of the board] ...things happening behind

the scenes are just not professional. Best, MB (Gasman, personal communication, January 19, 2014).

The board activity progressed. The woman who was chair of the finance committee, as well as the woman who was chair of the personnel committee, called into question in very detailed manner the lack of due diligence on addressing a number of matters within the board, which directly highlighted the board's interference and seemingly intentional lack of support for efforts to stabilize the University's finances, and senior personnel.

There was another comparison made by Suber and that was the interference of the media. "There was a media blitz...the media went back to its old habits of publishing without verifying. There was just a blitz of stuff". This media blitz lead to an inquiry from the SACS, the accrediting body for colleges and universities. It is a SACS standard to request supporting documentation from schools who, through various means including the media, have had financial management or governance matters raised as concerns. The February 28, 2014 letter from SACSA vice president, specifically referenced February 20, 2014 article in the *News and Observer* related to the school facing financial uncertainty. The letter from SACS

...got played up as the school being in trouble with accreditation. The media kept a hold of that. It became a barrage of accelerated activity to defame me as a leader, to show my competence, an issue of who I employed and whether those people were ...competent started hitting the media...given social media and all, it became very difficult to manage".

There were two personnel decisions Suber made in her final days. One was the placement of the university provost (who would be the fourth person to serve as chief academic officer during Suber's 14-year tenure), who was proving to be counterproductive to even supporting and

implementing the approved deans' recommendations for action. She issued a letter to President Suber indicating she it was "impossible for her to support the recommendation for consolidation" which the university's labor attorney used in the letter issued to the provost in March 2014 to severe her employment from the university. The other employment decision, was one of Dr. Suber's final actions. According to communication exchanged between board members, the chief financial officer's skill and ability had been questioned by the board in fall 2013, yet Suber had defended her business and finance team. She employed the services of a financial expert who had supported the institution and served as a consultant to a number of HBCUs in North Carolina to provide additional guidance. However, as aforementioned, it is believed that a core of staff members began to assist with the agenda of the board. Suber says in the last 100 days it came to her attention that both the school's Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and recently separated vice president of development had participated in mismanagement of funding. Human resources launched an investigation that did result in a finding of fraudulent payments of made to an employee. In addition, the CFO began by-passing protocols and either speaking directly to the board, or refusing to act or respond to requests of Suber as president for financial information. Dr. Suber presented that to the board the board did not take action. That finding along with other concerns resulted in Suber termination of the CFO in the last week of March.

By March, I realized that I was not going to be able to successfully continue in the role for the good of the institution. I made up my mind that I would work that year. I was entitled to sabbatical. I was going to take the sabbatical the fall of 2014 and then actually come back that second semester and retire at the end of the academic year 2015... Then a series of just point blank activities got put into place by the board that made it impossible



for me to stay ahead of them. I decided I'd go ahead and retire rather than to ... I just ran out of steam basically is what happened in those last 100 days.

Suber says she notified her adult children two days prior that she would be releasing the notice of her retirement by the end of the week. Emails confirm that she sent the notice of retirement to staff who had been supporters and allies in the efforts to maintain stability, and her letter to the board chair, and to the media almost simultaneously. In her retirement statement to the press, released immediately on April 4, and reported by Stuart (2012) in *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, Suber said “Sometimes we tend to ‘stay to long at the fair’. More often, we stay just long enough.” The *News and Observer* article on April 7, after the board chair held a press conference on campus, also on Monday, April 7, confirms that Suber’s retirement announcement was a surprise and occurred prior to a vote being taken during a conference call Friday, without following protocol according to Suber, by the board.

### **Pivotal Moments**

In order to assess weight of importance of those moments solely to the lived experience of the participant, the results (milestones, then pivotal moments) are recorded entirely based on Dr. Suber’s responses.

The first milestone for Suber represented a solid level of support and a show of confidence in her ability to set and implement a vision for the institution. It was the resignation of her first board chair.

He [who was himself African American] demonstrated open distain for women, African Americans and southerners...eight months after I assumed the presidency...his efforts to demonstrate how I had not ‘fixed things’ failed. He resigned at the end of 2000.

As noted above one of the things she quickly realized at the beginning of her tenure was the school's lack of readiness for the pending SACSA review. So, her next noted milestone was the successful completion of the accreditation process:

First time the team came we went on warning for finances, which was fine for me because they identified issues that needed to be addressed...it gave me leverage to make some necessary changes. The following year, we were accredited, fully with no compliance issues.

As is often the case, true impact takes time to be realized. Changes to curriculum, and the development of student affairs initiatives designed to build cultural capital were not as evident in the first year. Suber talked about her fourth commencement ceremony as evidence of the impact of her leadership in that regard. She says of the graduation of the first full class (May 2004):

Those students who were freshmen in Fall 2000...at their graduation we were able to see the things we'd put in place like student leadership organizations, the honor society, all things that were not there, that class acknowledged it had been a great experience.

Though she acknowledges the success of St. Aug's student athletes during her first couple of years has little to do with her leadership, she did consider a milestone her ability to build rapport with them in a real way, a way that demonstrated how committed she was to holistic student success, during one of *their* most memorable experiences early on in her tenure. Suber considers her attending the 2000 Olympics in Australia as a milestone for another unexpected reason.

The first year I was there I had seven students complete in Australia and 4 gold medalists. I did go to Australia. I took my own money and went to Australia...that was a milestone because I was there when they competed and afterwards, the publicity that that

got...opportunity to meet with the mayor...and governor...gave me opportunity to be introduce to that part of Raleigh and North Carolina.

Perhaps one of the most notable milestones for Suber was in fact the re-introduction of football:

When people write about me, [it's always] 'Dianne Boardley Suber, who brought back football after 37 years'...[I consider it a milestone because ]it gave alums a reason to come back to campus. It generated a level of pride and...excitement in the alumni base...I was also the person who convince the CIAA to start giving award for high academic achievement for teams...then for 8 of the 9 years of football, the football program at St. Aug always had the highest academic achieving athletes.

Lastly, in the narrative, Suber discussed one of the more lasting impacts of her presidency which was the elevation in the status of the institution. It was under her leadership that Saint Augustine's College became Saint Augustine's University. The change from college to university. Simply stated she says of that major change, "It was a very unifying act that raised the profile of the institution."

The aforementioned experiences, Suber considered milestone as the noted events signaled significant points of success or achievements for her in her role as president. Below are those experiences she considered to pivotal moments- those experiences that demonstrated a shift in direction either for the university or for her within the context of her role as its leader. Needing little description, and therefore giving none, Suber's first recollection of pivotal moments in her 14-year tenure were the two cycles of successful SACS re-accreditation. She then touts the new construction on campus.

Board member, David Faulk who facilitated the building of a new residence hall on campus- 320 beds. That was significant.

David Faulk served as a member of one of the more supportive compositions of her Board of Trustees Suber discussed. His support resulted in yet another pivotal moment – the re-acquisition of Meadowbrook Golf Country Club:

Faulk purchased it and then 4 years later gifted it to St. Aug. We were able to restore, renovate and upgrade the greens. It became a focal place for the community, and the remaining original owners who were African-American.

She also considered offering of new academic majors that specifically set SAU apart from its peer institutions.

Majors such as property management, biophysics, and communications majors with a film and interactive media option., for example. Development of these kinds of majors that would ensure we were not just a good HBCU to attend, but a desirable, full, comprehensive institution that happens to be an HBCU.

Her final two pivotal moments we discussed were directly related to the composition and influence of her board of trustees. One was specific to the cycles of board chairs:

I had 2 cycles of board chair who actually were visionary in their thinking, and who were supportive...for that period of about 4-5 years we experienced unprecedented growth...in enrollment...visibility. During those cycle the governance and administration relationship was as it was supposed to be.

The other was about her realization of a misalignment of the plan for SAU:

I guess the most significantly pivotal piece was when I realized that there was an element on the board that had a vision and a plan for Saint Aug that was different than the direction in which we had been growing.

It is that final pivotal moment Suber says was what ultimately resulted in her leaving the university.

**Dr. Dorothy Cowser Yancy: First Woman President of  
Johnson C. Smith University (JCSU)**

Dorothy Cowser Yancy has had a head for business since she was a small child. She was responsible for managing the money and paying the workers on her father's large, family farm in Alabama from the age of 9. She matriculated as undergraduate freshman at Johnson C. Smith University the age of 16, in 1960, graduating in 1964 with a dual degree in History and Social Sciences. She received her Masters in History from University of Massachusetts in Amherst. She took courses at a number of prestigious institutions including the University of Singapore, and was a Fulbright Scholar at Washington University. She obtained her doctorate from Atlanta University in Political Science. Yancy was the first African-American to be promoted and tenured at Georgia Institute for Technology, where she worked from 1972-1994. While she had been appointed as Associate Director of the School of Social Science, and at one point served as co-director, she admits to not liking administration and resigned that leadership position. She was an active member of the board of trustees at her alma mater, but she was serving as a full-time faculty at Georgia Tech when she became interim president of Johnson C. Smith University.

Unlike Drs. Bryan and Suber, Dr. Yancy accepted another opportunity to lead an HBCU after her tenure ended at JCSU. She served two non-consecutive stints as the Interim President of Shaw University in Raleigh, North Carolina. However, with that experience concluded, I conducted my interview with Dr. Yancy, on December 8, 2016, in her Atlanta home, surrounded by the many crystal, china, bronze and silver acknowledgements of her successes mounted on walls and donning shelves, among vibrant pieces of art that told stories all their own.

## **What She Walked Into – A School in Crisis**

Johnson C. Smith University is a private, historically black college, located in city of Charlotte, North Carolina. Today it is categorized as an urban university. It was founded as The Freedmen's College of North Carolina, by two ministers of the Presbyterian church who believed there was a need for a school for blacks in that section of the South (Unknown, n.d.). The college became an independent college that was associated with the Presbyterian church in the late 1930s. The university's website, through a chronological history, specifically notes that women were not admitted until 1941.

In the 1980s, Charlotte, North Carolina was building a reputation as the second Atlanta, being compared to one of the south's more influential, modern urban cities. That ballooned after the merger of Nation's Bank and Bank of America in 1998 (O'Daniel, 2012). In making a comparison to Atlanta, Charlotte was also growing as a desirable location for upwardly mobile, college-educated African-Americans. There were a number of draws to Charlotte that made the JCSU campus location close to uptown Charlotte, a place of prime location for either growth, or an opportunity to be lost in the mix. Charlotte also had built a foundation as one of the largest locations for the banking and finance industry. In addition, it was the home of NASCAR headquarters in located in Charlotte, along with the Charlotte Speedway. And in 1988 (through 2002) North Carolina's first National Basketball Association team, the Charlotte Hornets called Charlotte home. Then and now, JCSU has been lauded for its "strong community relationships and strategic partnerships with businesses, corporations and professional groups" (Retrieved from university website: [www.jcsu.edu](http://www.jcsu.edu)).

Johnson C. Smith appointed Dr. Yancy to its board of trustees in the fall of 1991. In the Spring of 1994 she was asked to serve as the interim president, after then president Robert

Albright announced he would be leaving to become the Executive Vice President of the Educational Testing Service, Inc. in Princeton, New Jersey (Johnson, Raynor, & Smith, 2008, p. 13).

There were structural and infrastructure shortcomings. There were fiber optics cables in the ground for the potential for technology, but what appeared to be computers on employees' desks were not connected. The façade of the administration building was brick-pointed (a masonry process whereby cracks within the mortar of the bricks are re-cemented to protect from the entry of water and excessive moisture), and a new entrance constructed, but the remaining part of the building did not have a properly fortified foundation or pitched roof to prevent flooding. There were buildings built in 1892 with heating systems that were installed by a company outside of North Carolina that would not work in the winter. There were residence halls that had no air conditioning. While there were issues with facilities, structural issues that pre-existed Dr. Yancy's tenure, the larger issue was that of cash flow. As reported through financial documents, JCSU had a meager \$14,000 of unrestricted funds in the summer of 1994. The total cash on hand at the end of fiscal year 1993, was \$2.6 million dollars. There was a lack of financial policies, and the practices were not sound practices. For example, the university may pay for a conference that has all meals included, but staff was still advanced a per diem for food (Johnson et al., 2008, p. 87). The institution's bad debt amounted to \$686,233 that could not be collected (Johnson et al., 2008, p. 33).

The other major challenge that existed prior to Dr. Yancy being selected as JCSU's president was that, while she had been a primary author of the university's strategic planning as a member of the board, faculty and staff had not seen that document, nor were they using it to

guide course work or student learning outcomes (Johnson et al., 2008, p. 20). Thus, the institution was less than prepared for its accreditation review.

### **The Transitional Period**

The data presented for Dr. Yancy related to this period will reflect the period for which Dr. Yancy serves Interim President of JCSU. She was elected by the board of trustees to serve in an interim capacity after the announcement that the then president would be leaving to lead another organization in New Jersey. She was appointed Interim in January 1994; she was to begin March 1, 1994, but was asked to transition to Charlotte from Atlanta, Georgia in February. She says this about the initial move to Atlanta and the one month she shared the same space with the outgoing president:

...I was asked to come for the month of February to have a transition with the sitting president...He was on his way. He was packing and moving...I had a little office in the hallway where I could ask him questions and stuff like that that. He was basically moving. The [board] chair insisted that there be a transition...It wasn't really much shadowing...I was [at Georgia Tech] two weeks after the election. I found someone teach my classes because school had started...I arranged with Georgia Tech to be on leave [JCSU] bought my services.

Some decisions or activities that occurred in her transition period were based of tutelage she'd received from her former president at Georgia Tech.

You had to do things that made students happy....student need an aesthetically pleasing campus to learn...We started planting flowers everywhere...That first April, when I was interim, ...Earth Day. We cleaned the campus and we planted flowers everywhere. We started planting. Every season, we plant and that's why that campus blooms to this day.



When she came on as interim, the school was in the middle of a \$50 million capital campaign. She says she jumped right into that. Yancy acknowledges was already working with faculty to help them write grants. She also made calls to donors, and engaged in other activities to advance the institution. One of the things she did was to solicit funding from a group that had never, until that point, given money to a school under an interim president. She was aware of that because she had been a member of the board of trustees. She says also of that period:

...I'd never raised money before, and I actually enjoyed it; I had a good time selling the school and the students. ...One thing my predecessor did give me was a list... It wasn't that I walked into nothing...he had done a very good job at developing partnerships with foundations and the business community. He wrote the list on a piece of paper. [He said] "These are all the foundations you're going to see right away. Go see them as interim. Don't wait. We can't have a gap here. I remember Mellon, this was the first things that happened...telling me that they could not make an appointment with me because they did not fund interim presidents...it was the man over a grant...I was looking for other money [to support the faculty who wanted to do something in faculty development]. I ...had known the man for years...I got my briefcase, and I put all these board books, and faculty reports, and everything because they were trying to put together the faculty development [institute].

Dr. Yancy recounted step for step what she did and said in that gentleman's office in Princeton, New Jersey convincing him that this investment was not in her but in work related to supporting research, and work that would remain "after she got back to Georgia Tech."

Another area that Dr. Yancy began to consider and address during her period of transition. In his chapter entitled *The Age of Infrastructure in Yancy's presidential*

commemorative history, Johnson et al. (2008) posits "...while thorough investigation and excavation of [fiscal and technological infrastructure] was partly accomplished while serving as a member of the Board of Trustees' Strategic Planning...Yancy's first statement to the then vice president of finance was, 'Show me the books' (p. 20)." According to Yancy what she found during the transition period was "there was no money for July and August. You had to figure out how to live for July and August". As aforementioned the school had very limited unrestricted funds, and modest cash on hand upon her arrival. Yancy's efforts through what has been described as "fierce tenacity and persistence" resulted in her first formal President's fiscal report to the Board of Trustees be recorded as "end[ing] the fiscal year June 30, 1994, with a balanced budget and monies to place into the Fund Balance" (Johnson et al., 2008, p. 20).

Dr. Yancy was asked to officially apply for the permanent position as president in April, on the same day the applications were due. She did, and continued working as interim. She indicates it was a long period of time, and she just kept working with employees to get ready for SACS, and to complete the capital campaign. She was organizing, trying to figure out how to bring in the next first year class, and "doing the normal things you do".

The board announced Dr. Dorothy Cowser Yancy as the permanent president during JCSU's homecoming in October 1994. Her permanency in the role was effective immediately.

### **First 100 Days**

Dr. Yancy's first 100 days were focused on fundraising, preparing for SACS, and beginning the work of upgrading the campus technology. For consideration and consistency of reporting, Dorothy C. Yancy's first "100 days" has been determined to be October 1994 through December 1994. Dr. Yancy was announced as, and assumed the role officially as president in

October 1994. One of her first hurdles was addressing a student protest. It in the midst of homecoming activities.

Just as I was being announced, getting ready to be announced, the students had a protest.

I knew it. I was at UNCF meeting in Dallas, Texas. It was at October. I got on the plane early and came back to JCSU. The students were protesting. Turns out it wasn't about me.

It was about what they thought the school was not doing and should be doing, but they weren't expressing it very well. A couple of the kids, one was the editor of the newspaper, and the other was in student government. I talked to them. I had them in my office. I found out what was really going on with them.

Johnson et al. (2008) says she also charged them to “re-read” W. E. B. Dubois’s *The Souls of Black Folk*. “She gently but firmly encouraged them to re-read it, without once referring to the somewhat uncertain financial future for the university” (Johnson et al., 2008, p. 21). Yancy intertwines her recollections of her student encounters with notes of about what those former students are doing in their current-day careers. She says of that meeting amidst the protest, “I knew I had to keep raising money. I knew had to keep working on SACS. I knew that I had to do it all at the same time”.

In the retelling of story, Dr. Yancy’s three areas of focus often intersect. When she began the first of two capital campaigns under her tenure, was underway. The first, as alluded to above was a five year, \$50-million-dollar campaign. She had begun working toward helping that college meet that goal during her transition period. She also received a visit from a faculty member who was leading the accreditation efforts. It was from this faculty member Yancy learned the current strategic plan, which had been showed to her by her predecessor and in which she had some influence as a board member, had not made its way to the employee or student

population. During her first 100 days, she engaged an IBM executive to come and help her and a group to work on the strategic plan. She says at the time IBM had a strong educational division, so she contacted two people this gentleman and a woman who had also been acting as consultants, to come to Charlotte and they formed a team to work on the strategic plan.

I got him, and her, and did the plan and worked on it for days. We had somebody from the physical plant, students, alumni board, faculty and staff...Everybody bought into it.

That's how I got them [to trust me]. I had them buy into the strategic plan, and where we wanted to go, and what we wanted to do.

Technological infrastructure appears throughout the results of the narrative of Dr. Yancy's tenure, but especially during her first 100 days. She notes that one of the things she encountered early on was that although there were computer labs on campus, those labs were reserved for computer science majors. However, the general computer labs for other students were virtually non-existent or inoperable.

That first year I was trying to figure out what to do about my technology, because I only had 14 computers for students, and two of them did not work...I had to figure out how to get computers. We didn't have any money, so I remembering going to the Army, and a whole bunch of other places, and getting computers and then started changing them and upgrading them".

Dr. Yancy's modus operandi was to do all the thing she saw was needed, all at the same time.

What she also spent time doing in the first 100 days was reading. She went through many institutional documents, reporting that she often stayed in the office well into the evening reading everything in all the cabinets, and learning everything she could about what had been done what existed. By doing so, she was also finding out more about with whom she was working. One of

the things Dr. Yancy did in that first 100 days was to request resumes from all the employee – faculty and staff. She also provided a template for which she wanted the resumes to be delivered to her. She was a firm believer that the resumes would tell her what a person had done, what they had not done -as it would not appear on the resume, and what were their strengths i.e. were they being used in the best way? She notes that request caused anxiety among the campus, so much so that the employees refer to the deadline for resume submission as “Black Friday.” Yancy did not bring anyone with her or replace senior staff upon becoming permanent. While she did not any significant staffing changes in her whole first year, she did use the resumes, and her time working alongside faculty and staff on fundraising and infrastructure projects to build human capital. An example of a change she recommended just at the end of her 100 days was reflected in the board minutes of her January 1995 President’s Report.

...An audit revealed that “the Budget Analyst is currently spending 95% of his time, processing requisitions rather than performing analytical and accounting duties that he has the credentials to perform”. As a result of this information, a new position was established, Accounts Payable Fiscal Assistant, to “allow the duties and responsibilities of the Budget Analyst to be fully functional and relieve the conditions noted by the auditors” (Yancy, as quoted by Johnson et al., 2008, p. 22).

Finally, of significance in terms of her first 100 days, and under what this researcher is categorizing as a culmination of fundraising, preparing for SACS, and beginning the work of upgrading the campus technology, she also continued to get to know the students. More poignantly, she got to know what was happening on campus through her students. She would simply make herself present where they were and talk to them. “I used to sit on the corner [of the wall] and talk to them...When you go into the student union, there’s a wall as you’re going to

one of the dormitories. The kids used to sit on that wall.” Yancy attributes a number of discoveries that lead to changes processes to talks she had sitting on the wall. She learned from those talks that students did not read the view books the campus admissions produced as a way to market to potential students. She learned what word-of-mouth meant in the role of alumni and recruiting. She even learned who was the technology guru or geek from the students. She says she would watch students come in and out of the director of first year experience’s office in the evening, and when she questioned the students “What y’all do in his office in the evening?” she learned he was the best person on campus, with using and interpreting technology.

I sent for him. I said, "Look. We have a crisis. We got students who are not learning the software they need to learn. I got faculty who don't know the software so they can teach it. We have to come up with a way to backdoor technology to get a jumpstart. The way we're going to jumpstart this"... “They had a plan they had gotten. They had put in the fiber for the campus.”

That strategy proved very successful. Dr. Yancy’s first 100 days can be characterized as jumping in, finding the problem and developing the solution, and a “Computerization Strategy” with a team of people, all at the same time.

Dr. Yancy led Johnson C. Smith for 14 years before she announced her exit. During that time the university saw unmatched growth, and became one of the “most wired” universities in that era. A “visible sign of her legacy” construction of, and the related programming therein, of The Technology Center on JCSU’s campus. Her accomplishments were vast, including serving as the first woman chairperson for the CIAA, and being instrumental in its move to Charlotte which also sparked a resurgence of basketball tournament popularity and attendance. The university drastically lowered its bad debt percentages, FFEL default rates, and its Perkins Loan

default rates, and maintained the highest Dunn and Bradstreet ratings available for colleges and universities. Yancy's tenure was marked with a remarkable record of garnering financial support and grants from outside agencies and organizations for technology, science and teaching and learning. Faculty development and scholarship was at a record high with faculty and students traveling, studying and presenting internationally at Obirin University in Japan, University of Wollongong in Australia, Shaanxi Teachers University in China; and University of Bahrain to name a few. Yancy even lead the NC Consortium for International and Intercultural Education delegation to Moscow on an observation tour. Yancy definitely raised the national profile for JCSU in an unmatched way.

### **The Last 100 Days**

Dr. Yancy's last day at Johnson C. Smith was June 2008. The headlines in the article in the *Charlotte Observer* read "Formidable Leader bids JCSU farewell" (Perlmutter, 2008, p. A1). The article went on to discuss her accomplishments, but opened with a note that as has been a tradition at JCSU since the 1900s for graduating seniors to scribble their name on a wooden rafter in the bell tower, Yancy – who did not honor that tradition as a student- had climbed into the bell tower and done so on her last day (Perlmutter, 2008, p. A1). Dr. Yancy's last official day as president came one year after she announced her retirement.

During the interview, Dr. Yancy gave very little details about her last 100 days which would have encompassed the period from February 28, 2008 through June 30, 2008. In the interview and other writings or articles, Dr. Yancy suggests that in some regards a person who remains in a position after an announcement of departure, would be considered in that last year as a "lame duck," but acknowledges that even though that's what one may be, she refused to be one (Johnson et al., p. 78). She says "you don't get anything done that last year. I did some

things that I shouldn't have done...I kept on fixing stuff, and building stuff, and doing the things I needed to do, and sending people to programs”.

Specifically, in her final days in the role as JCSU president, Dr. Yancy secured the technology and ensured it would continue to operate beyond her date of departure. She replaced the core mainframe for the whole campus. “By the time I left, I had replaced all the servers, because that was before the cloud. I didn't want anything to crash once I left. We were dependent on that system”.

She also continued to raise the profile of JCSU and advocate for JCSU, and use her influence and reputation to raise the issues of black colleges to a national level.

In March 2008, Dr. Yancy was one of only four HBCU presidents to represent their students before the House Education and Labor Hearing on Capitol Hill. The title of the hearing was “America's Black Colleges and Universities: Models of Excellence and Challenges for the Future”; UNCF affiliate presidents were invited to give reasons HBCUs were still relevant...Yancy cited National Science Foundation data that show six of the top 20 predominantly white institutions receive more federal research dollars than 79 HBCUs combined” (Johnson et al., 2008, p. 80).

Johnson C. Smith University is a CIAA conference institution. One of Dr. Yancy's noted accomplishments in the commemorative history was that she served as the first chairwoman of the CIAA, though that is not one of her own reported milestones. In the final 100 days, JCSU Men's Basketball team won the CIAA championship, and during the same tournament, Miss JCSU was crowned Miss CIAA. JCSU Women's Softball team also won their first CIAA championship in the Spring of 2008.



One of the milestones Dr. Yancy discusses at length is the elevation of academic programming on campus during her tenure, particularly through the accreditation process, and increasing faculty development. In her April 2008 meeting with the Board of Trustees, the master's programs in the areas of Computer Science and Business Administration and Economics were formally approved by the board (Johnson et al., 2008, p. 85).

Again, Dr. Yancy's last 100 days were an amalgamation of the same areas of focus she had during the beginning of her tenure. It is important to note that throughout the interview, Dr. Yancy rarely uses "I" statements, instead responding about what "we" did. When asked what was different, about the beginning of her tenure and the final days of her JCSU presidency, she said this:

I think we had, by then, a faculty and staff that had much more confidence in themselves and much more assured of their ability and where they fit and the contribution that they were making in higher education. There were a lot of programs that they were on the cutting edge of. Over time they began to understand that they were doing a very, very good job. We had some very good students. I'll never forget. One day I had a kid came to school early. I think he must have come to Smith when he was about 14. He was showing some people around in the technology center. He had his little chest stuck out and all. I said, "God, you're awfully arrogant today."... He looked me in the eye and he said, "Dr. Yancy, this is not arrogance. I'm confident." ...There was an air of confidence that students had. Those computers did more for them than any gadget that you could have ever given them because it said something.... [there were] improved facilities, and we built the stadium, and they had classrooms under the stadium, because I built classrooms under that stadium. They had the labs that they needed for their kinesiotherapy classes

and all that. All that was built in there. They had a different view...I think the community looked at us differently. I know the foundation in the business world did. There were doors that were open.

### **Pivotal Moments**

Dr. Yancy's narrative was very inclusive as she identified accomplishments of her presidency. Those experiences were categorized as milestones, some of which I included in the brief synopsis of her accomplishments outside of the specific time period being explored in my study. In order to assess weight of importance of those milestones, as well as the pivotal moments solely to the lived experience of the participant, the results (milestones, then pivotal moments) are entirely based on Dr. Yancy's responses.

Dr. Yancy was very intentional in developing the teaching capabilities and exposure of her staff. So it was not a surprise she considered as one of the milestones of her tenure at JCSU to be faculty productivity:

The faculty became more productive because they were beginning to produce; they had national recognition. We had a joint agreement with Al Akhawayn University in Morocco; and MGIMO in Soviet Union.

Her vision around innovation in the way in which students learned resulted in the establishment of the Freshmen Academy:

Students were put into groups based on their majors. They could do joint projects and the professors all worked together.

There was the computerization of campus:

We went live in 1995. [I am credited for turning JCSU into a laptop campus. Getting the software and having the faculty and students trained was a goal but] my vision of

technology was not just to do the laptop thing. My vision was, this is what's going to drive teaching. It's a requirement to be able to compete in the world. Students even ran our Training Lab, which was for faculty, staff, students to learn the technology. It was about competing in the 21st century.

As well as the establishment of the Student Technical Assistant program:

We trained the students to operate as help desk support on campus. Everybody wanted it because it paid \$10/hour. [JCSU] still has it. I knew we would never have enough professionals in computer science to run the computer systems that I wanted. We trained the students...and when they went for a job, they got intermediate positions in the technology field, because they had been doing help desk for 3-4 years.

And of course completion of SACS:

SACS is on-going. But my first review as president was [significant] because when I got there it was a mess. To submit a SACS report and the response is "no additional documentation needed" is a big deal. Social Work, Education and Business were accredited.

Yancy had an early milestone that set the course for a presidency marked with financial sustainability for the university. Her completion of the first, five-year capital campaign:

We finished that campaign exceeding the goal, by raising \$63 million.

For Yancy, the following are what she considered to be pivotal moments. JCSU's receipt of the MacArthur Foundation "Genius" Award:

In 1996, and I always forget to tell this, we received this award. It gave us visibility with foundations that we had not had before, because they had never given it to a college before...opened doors because people saw you.

During her tenure Yancy had multiple experiences with both capital campaigns and accreditation. She viewed the two experiences, on each count differently – with one set as a milestone, and her second experience as a pivotal moment. About her 2nd capital campaign she said:

I started this one. The goal was \$75 million. I could never get my board to come up with a leadership group for the campaign. I was in the middle of it, and someone said “Dorothy you what you should do if they don’t lead it? You should finish [it] and announce victory”. That made me say “...that’s a good idea”.

She said SACS is on-going, but of the SACS reaffirmation during the latter part of her tenure she recalls:

I had two campaigns and two SACS official review cycles. I told myself, “I can’t leave until I finish [the campaign]; can’t leave until I finish SACS. We got the social work program and education reaffirmed.

Just as was the case with the previously explored women, Yancy noted multiple pivotal moments related to her board of trustees. First was the exit of her first board chair:

The board chair was also up for the interim presidency position [but he was not selected]. He tortured me for three years. I was ready to leave. Mrs. Belk was on my board. She helped me move him off the board.

There was also the election of new (her third and last) board chair:

He should have never been on the board...he always wanted to go in a different direction.... he wanted me gone, as much as I wanted to be gone. I told him and the vice president of the board I was going to leave, and told them when I planned on doing it...but they did not know the day I’d make the actual announcement.

As a board-related act she discussed the provost appointment and resignation:

The board insisted I hire a number two. He was working against me [especially in the preparation for accreditation] ...I had to take SACS back from him...and call SACS to tell them I was having difficulties with him...He wanted to run the whole school...I figured out I couldn't trust him, but I could not let him go in middle for SACS...so I isolated him...the day we finished SACS, he resigned.

Different than the other participants whose last 100 days coincided with the announcement of their departure, Dr. Yancy's announcement occurred one year prior to her actual departure ergo, her last 100 days. Her pivotal moments reveal greater insight into decision and timing of the announcement of her exiting the university. Yancy says her goal was to get a perfect score on SACS, and to complete the \$75 million capital campaign.

When I got my money right, for my campaign, I announced my departure all in the same day. I said, "I might as well announce a victory and departure at the same time." That's what I did. I went and got me a new suit and put it on. I did. I went to New York and bought a new St. John's. I had it that day. I had a little meeting with my various people. I told them what I was doing. They were all surprised, but I wasn't. I had been thinking about that for some time. You look good when you arrive, and you look good when you leave.

### **Cross-Case Analysis**

Though no two college presidencies are the same, there are points of comparison that developed through the interviews and review of secondary data. In the sections above, the findings for each woman is presented in the context of the three distinct periods of their presidency as each school's first woman president: their transitional period, their first 100 days,

and their final 100 days. As I consider the points of comparison in those experiences, there also emerged findings that occurred as each woman reflected on her tenure in its totality. That analysis is presented below under broader categories.

### **Transition Period Comparisons**

Bryan and Suber's transition periods were shorter than Yancy's, with Bryan's (30 days) being the shortest of all three interviewed. Perhaps that limited transition period, behind a black male predecessor who resigned under duress, could be seen as a predictor of a short tenure. However, for Bryan, it appeared that the not knowing, the significance of the prevailing climate, and the level of crisis of the institution that would have been a predictor of internal and external support, and less about the length of the transition period.

For Dr. Dorothy Cowser Yancy, the first woman president of Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, North Carolina, the transition period provided the greatest foundation among the three participants, as she had direct and deliberate access to the outgoing president, who left completely on his own (even as he was preparing to move), and she jumped into the role as an interim, with no real expectation of staying or even applying for the position.

### **Relationship with Board of Trustees**

In the literature review, the interaction with the board of trustees is noted as one of the challenges of the presidency. Throughout this study, the literature helped to frame the challenge, however I found governing board interference and interaction to be a major contributor to the success or perceived failure of a college president. In the introduction of the study, the board of trustees' involvement is considered as one of the external entities to which a president is held accountable, but it also has the propensity to add unrealistic pressure on the day to day work of the university president. Through the narratives of three of the first black women to lead an

HBCU, the interaction with the board of trustees took on many forms, but it was a strong emphasis in the experience of each participant.

The relationship that seems to have been the turning point, whether in the first 100 days, or in her last, for each of these women, was the relationship with her board of trustees. As a note, Bryan's relationship with the FSU board was not part of her narrative but rather with the UNC System Board of Governors, which for a public university in North Carolina, has as great, if not greater impact, on one's ability to succeed, and grow an institution. Findings for Bryan and her time at Fayetteville State University, were made with the UNC system board in mind. Throughout this inquiry influence of the board of trustees was evident.

In Suber's experience, results indicate the greatest conflict with the board of trustees, most notably as she considered the pivotal moments of her tenure. In the moments as recorded, she recalled those key periods when her attempts to grow the institution and expand its profile proved to be the alternative to the plan for certain members of her board (primarily the three white males who were staples of the Raleigh community). She also noted a pivotal moment during her first 100 days where the African-American male board chair, commenced to discredit her efforts and abilities. However, in that instance, other board members were able to combat his efforts, which resulted in his resignation from the board. In Suber's case, the gender composition of her board was discussed, but what had greater impact was the prevailing climate of presiding at a school in the state's capital city that proved to be more impactful, even when the composition of the board became more balanced.

The experience for Dr. Yancy varied from that of Dr. Suber's experiences. For Yancy, while she too had issues with her initial board chair (who wanted to be considered for the Interim Presidency himself), and a white woman on the board helped craft a strategy for his removal

from the board, it was her third board of trustee chair that was the most detrimental. In her recollection she saw him as unqualified and “not intelligent enough” for the role. She did not see him as being credited with any “downfall” because she purports to have left in her own timing. However, it was at the urging of that third chair, that she had to hire “provost” to serve as the number two, and it was that provost that worked intentionally to undermine and undergird efforts she was making to continue to move JCSU forward, but particularly as it related to the goal of achieving a second SACS reaffirmation with no findings. Yancy’s additional comments about her board, are noted in with the same consistency as her recollection of “discovery of the little things” being the things for which she was not prepared. She discussed how her board chair would make mention of her not having changed her car license plates from a Georgia tag to a North Carolina tag. She also says she was repeatedly questioned by a woman on her board about the privacy of her dating life (Yancy was divorced at the time of her presidency), and also about her building a home in Atlanta, versus choosing to build or purchase in Charlotte. To each experience Yancy responded with a quick witted retort- something she considers to have been a strength she developed as a child.

In Bryan’s case, she discusses her success being less tied to the board of trustees, and more the professional agenda of the UNC system president. She did acknowledge the impact of a vocally supportive board member, who also had ties to the Fayetteville community, who decided to vacate his position early in her tenure because of an ailing spouse. That African-American male FSU board of trustee member “left right away; I didn’t know his role in [the negotiation of my] contract...in a way [that] gave the *Fayetteville Observer* permission to write negative articles about me. He [unintentionally] said some things to [them]... they interpreted as his not having my back...” She posits that since she was hired by UNC system president Molly Broad,



that for as long as Ms. Broad was in the role, Bryan's reputation was a bit more protected, and her efforts to grow, stabilize and solidify FSU and its profile were successful. The reason she believed that was that the growth strategy was in line with Molly Broad's vision for FSU. The stabilization of the FSU brand, and the growth of the institution under her leadership, was not the plan when Broad left, and UNC system president Erskine Bowles took over the system position. As aforementioned, one of the matters for which Bryan's predecessor never fully responded to was the legislative initiative to change the name and rebrand Fayetteville State University as UNC at Fayetteville. While that issue did not arise again during Bryan's tenure, it is worth noting that it merely laid dormant. Although the resurgence of that campaign activity was beyond the timing of this study, it should be noted for future consideration that post Bryan's tenure, there was another legislative overture made to change the name of Fayetteville State. At the time of my study, the website address for FSU was "www.uncfsu.edu", however the other HBCU's in the UNC system websites reflect only the letters in the school's name.

### **Leading as a Black Woman**

In each case, the women's upbringing laid a foundation where their gender was not a defining characteristic of life or career goals. My findings revealed similar experiences with each of my participants, but in particular in those experiences of Drs. Yancy and Suber. While most of those accounts were shared outside of the formal interview, both women spoke about their fathers' role in their early development, with Suber talking about her father, a college professor, being the one who went to parent-teacher conferences and conducted the grocery shopping, as well as being one who taught her to question and challenge the societal norms. Dr. Yancy's childhood managing the wages for her father's farm from the time she was 9 years old, is briefly

explored by Johnson et al. (2008) as a foundation of her aptitude to get things done by building rapport, and managing and raising money.

However, in their experiences of being the first woman president or chancellor at the respective HBCU in a patriarchal environment, the findings confirm all three women had a realization that they must contend with the duality of their identity as black and female. Gender was not something initially present in any of the participants' responses to the initial questions, which had a slant toward the three timeframes of focus for this study- their transition period, their first 100 days and their final 100 days. Rather, each woman's narrative revealed their awareness of their womanhood in response to one question I reserved for the end of the interview. Each woman, in her own way, acknowledged how their gender was not something they had ever considered, at least not the same way in which their blackness had been an element of their identity. Their gender had not been made a focal point or posed dilemma in their career prior to their assuming their role as college president of an HBCU in North Carolina. The findings related to gender, were communicated during the interview and emerged more as lessons for aspiring black female leaders, as well as realizations about culture in a broader context.

### **The Bryan Experience**

Dr. Bryan perhaps shared one of the most profound realizations:

What I learned, I think more than anything else, is the importance of knowing the environment in which you are going to be functioning...In Maryland, for example, chancellors aren't let go or presidents aren't let go because of audit findings. I think North Carolina is sort of unique in that...There were people who thought I was arrogant...I think a lot thought I was accessible because I walked everywhere... (after an

aside she said) ...Back to the gender thing I think as a man I would have probably been more a member of a certain club perhaps.

She begins to give examples of how her joining the country club potentially upset the order of things:

A lot of black people didn't like it...There were some players in town who supported my being in the country club. That might have been a political mistake, but I looked at the long term and I thought I might raise money...There was a white woman, at my [going away program] who stood up there and said "If she had been a man, none of this would have happened.

### **The Suber Experience**

Suber found her identity as woman most relevant in her experience during her last 100 days.

I'm not sure that I ever conquered the burden of being African American and female. I don't have a placating, accommodating personality, I'm an advocate ... In much of my professional career, my competence, my articulation skills, my ability to analyze quickly and summarize and take action served as assets. That doesn't mean that I didn't get into trouble along the way, but almost in every other aspect of my career, the language would be, "She going to tell you what she thinks, but she's smart. She's this. She's that." It's positive. "If you want to get it done, give it to her to do." The 15 years at St. Aug was the first experience that I had where I actually was dealing with people whose reaction to that combination of skills and attributes was vicious; where people were not attacking decisions that were made or the true content of the decision but were personal in their attacks. I'm not sure I recognized being a woman was a REALLY big deal...had never

had to deal with the factor before, or so I thought. I'm not sure I recognized that that had not changed along the way.

### **The Yancy Experience**

Yancy lead with lessons, and after prompting, had this to say about her experience leading JCSU as its first black woman president:

I learned that you can't do anything, and you cannot move ahead, unless you have the support of the people. Everybody has a different way of getting the support. My way of getting their support was to get engaged with the work. I rolled up my sleeves and helped them do it...I learned at Georgia Tech that the two groups that you have to have supporting you, if you want to win a war, you have students and you have to have the faculty/staff. To [heck] with the rest of them...At first I didn't [have an awareness about being a woman in the role of president]. To be honest with you, at first I did not. It has been in recent years, that I could see what the problem was of being a woman, and it was colored by my experience at Georgia Tech. Whereas [there] being black was the guiding thing. You had more flack because of that than you did because you're a woman. It was so bad either way. I never could distinguish between the two sometimes. I went [to JCSU] with a view of the world, because I had been at Tech 20 something years. A view of the world that was not out of the same kind of glasses. I did see things being treated differently. For example, I thought that part of my travel getting messed up all the time was because that lady was used to doing travel for a man, and she didn't want to do travel for me. [What] I found out [it wasn't that with] that the secretary ...years later I discovered she was in early stages of Alzheimer's. It was not about the fact that I was a woman. [But] [a]t first it's what I thought it was.

Again, Yancy references her quick wit and ability to think on her feet, a skill she developed as a child playing with her brothers as a primary method of combatting the gender dilemmas she encountered.

I could fight with the best of them. I had won a whole lot of awards...there wasn't a man that I could not [take on]. If I had my stuff in some kind of order, I was going to win.

There existed a strong similarity in each women's unique ability to build a vision by anticipating the future, and their non-traditional leadership styles. Bryan, Suber and Yancy described their vision-setting strategy in their first 100 days as one whereby they pulled together a comprehensive, but small team of supporters (and skeptical students at JCSU) to redraft a strategic plan; to address the group of seniors who were on the verge of not graduating because the institution had not done its due diligence in a math course (SAU) and even to commence to recruiting an incoming freshmen class upon the discovery that applications were in sitting un-responded to in a box (FSU).

Another factor that seemed to exist in the experiences of each president was her sense of a greater commitment to the student development, beyond just what would be learned in the classroom. Each president spoke of milestones either in student programming or faculty development in terms of the impact it had on shaping their student populations for life beyond the campus community. Yancy shared the establishment of the Center for Information Services, which was "responsible for training faculty in the use of technology in instruction" (Johnson et al., 2008, p. 27). However, in doing so, she also discussed how students were trained to be support staff and staff the computer labs established on campus, positioning them to by-pass entry level helpdesk positions in information technology roles because they had been serving in that capacity sometimes for their whole collegiate career. She talks about providing support for

student athletes, inclusive of having a star athlete report to her office weekly as a condition of his being able to play while he strengthened his grades. However, in the narrative, she highlights how that struggling student, now is a coach in a high-performing high school in Raleigh, North Carolina. In her first 100 days, Yancy described a student protest led by then JCSU student government president and the editor of the student newspaper. One of those students is now, himself, an HBCU president. Dr. Bryan described as one of her milestones the establishment of the partnership with international educational institutions, including “the establishment of a first-rate foreign-language laboratory; and signing memoranda of understandings with seven Asian universities, and hosting Fulbright Language Teaching Assistants annually”. However, in the narrative, she highlights the students who were able to travel through that study abroad experience, inclusive of one young man, who was hired to teach English at a Mongolian university upon graduation. Suber spoke about her development of the Honors College and Student Leaders Program. In doing so she discussed how those experiences not only had an impact on enrolling a student population which became decreasingly dependent on federal aid, but also re-established a level of prestige and confidence for the SAU student. She spoke highly of the written accounts that do (writer’s emphasis) tout her for “bringing back football”, but in addition to being a draw for male students, it was also a way to demonstrate to black students they can succeed in spite of. *Walter* magazine, in an early edition, focused on the then-four woman presidents all leading private four-year universities in the city of Raleigh, North Carolina. At the time, Dr. Yancy was serving in the role as interim president of Shaw University (the first woman for that university as well), and Dr. Suber was in her role at SAU. In *Walter*, Roberts (2013) an exchange between Suber and Yancy was reported. Suber discussed a recent

experience where the SAU Student Leaders and athletic team student leaders attended a City of Raleigh city council meeting:

I took a group of kids to a town meeting where some of the community people were opposing the building of the stadium on our property, and clearly the dialogue was racist. They referred to us as “those people” and “that school” and all of the clichés that go along with racial bias. And I ended up with a group of students who were devastated and undone...And in that one moment we had an opportunity to see both sides of life - to understand that there were ...people in that neighborhood who were very much proponents...But there is this segment of the population out there [who are against you], and this segment is [one] you are going to have to move strategically around.

Yancy: A teachable moment.

Suber: We had a teachable moment.... these were athletes...in tears. And they said to me “Dr. Suber, they don’t want us here because we’re black. I said yeah, that’s exactly right.... This is why you must always defy the stereotypes” (Roberts, 2013, pp. 32-33).

Having reinstated football, she created a platform to highlight the possibility of high academic achievement for male student athletes, which was evident in the SAU teams repeatedly achieving the highest academic awards in the CIAA conference.

Suber’s narrative, coupled with the story as told to *Walter* magazine in 2013, also lends support to the pivotal moment she shares as it relates to the realization that there was a misalignment in the plans for the growth of SAU between she and members of her board of trustee that were also connected to the political agenda of the City of Raleigh.

## **Lesser Visibility**

It was in their retirement from their respective institutions that their accomplishments seem to be “less visible.” Each woman accomplished goals that had not been reached in the school’s recent history. For example, the contributions of the first woman to lead Fayetteville State University, Saint Augustine’s University and Johnson C. Smith, has been all but erased. Based on university public relations these women’s contributions have been diminished or deleted from the school’s recently published history. The library archive webpage acknowledges a bit of information about T. J. Bryan’s contribution to FSU as part of the archival data on the university’s leadership. In contrast, school’s Public Relations timeline on the institution’s website is very detailed, creating a visual of the emerging, growing institution that is the only oldest public HBCU in the state. However, as one reads through the many points of success and milestones, the appointment and tenure of the university’s first and, to date only, permanent woman chancellor appears as a mere mention. The appointment and tenure of this woman president reads as though a place holder in the school’s history- a time after one man just until the next man come along. Bryan raised the most money in the school’s history, yet is not recognized the same as her male counterparts. She grew the distance education and diversified the student body. She gained specialized accreditation for over 4 academic programs which was not done prior to her arrival, yet her accolades are relegated to being a no more than 2 sentences embedded in the paragraph about her predecessor. She developed the branding for a bar of excellence in programming and academics named “the Bronco Way”; and she was responsible for the purchase of the sizable bronze bronco, in front of which her successor posed, in his first appearance in the alumni journal after her departure. In Dr. Dianne Boardley Suber’s case, she made perhaps the most lasting impact on the institution by raising the status of Saint Augustine’s



from a college to a university, yet there is no mention of her throughout the school's on-line history. Saint Augustine's College gained university status in 2012 under the leadership. However, if I had not been an administrator at the institution during that timeframe, I would not know of her accomplishments that raised the institution to that status. However, if one were to conduct an on-line search for Dianne Suber on the website of Saint Augustine's University, even in the history section, there will be no results found. She is not even listed as first woman president on the school's website. Her leadership is not credited with the status change of the institution, the significant growth in enrollment of African-American males, nor the over 80% graduation rate for student athletes. Images of a visual timeline showing the progression of the school from inception to university, containing Suber, that were located on campus in the administrative building among trophy cases containing awards and recognition SAU garnered over decades have been removed. Even a photograph stretched into a wall-wrap of the day of the public reveal of the school's name change, featuring Suber at the Center, surrounded by key members of the board (one of whom became her successor), preserved in the library as an archival image of SAU history, was literally removed, and the wall painted over. JCSU does have a building named after Dorothy Cowser Yancy. In the commemorative history of Dr. Yancy, compiled by her former students, she is touted as "being known as a president that possessed a woman's touch in [campus] aesthetics that were also practical...[but also for] transcending gender stereotypes,...becoming a formidable figure in the area of fundraising" (Johnson et al., 2008, p. 26). Yet an article in *Charlotte Observer* about her successor suggested he was tasked with leading under the school, seven years after her departure, in crisis. This prompted Yancy's retort through the aforementioned op-ed piece about the truths of the financial strength of the institution at her departure. Yancy in a self-authored 2016 op-ed article in the

*Charlotte Observer* accomplished fundraising heights that have not met or exceeded her efforts women since she left her position (Yancy, 2016). This would support Gasman (2007) contention that even with notable contributions that raise the profile of more than one, black women's roles at black colleges have been omitted.

### **Lessons Learned**

There were portions of the narratives that defied categorization in a one-to-one comparison or analysis, or reflections that were provided less as evidence or examples of pivotal moments or milestones. I have categorized those findings in this cross-case analysis as lessons learned. The retelling of the story in this section of the analysis was based on reflections/realizations the presidents had after leaving the role. The narratives shared a common thread about discovery and institutional culture. During the interview Suber shared:

There were issues... Well I guess I went... I had been in public school education for so much of my career and then I had spent seven and a half years at Hampton. When I went to St. Aug, what I thought was going to happen was that I'd be in the same kind of situation with a new name and a new place. What I found was an institution that was very much different from the institution that I had left on a number of levels... I discovered... that in that particular environment... what I did not plan for in the first 100 days but that you need to plan for is the differences in cultural environments. What I discovered ... is that Raleigh traditionally is a very white male bastion, and so they were... the culture was unaccustomed to women being in charge. Unaccustomed to African Americans being in charge and certainly not used to a what-comes-up-comes-out personality which is pretty much what I am.

Of her exploratory visit to the campus prior to even applying for the position, Suber made statements about ways in which she could have better prepared during her transition:

We went and looked at Saint Augustine's [College] but what we didn't look at was the culture of the community. It was the culture of the community [people in these roles need to consider.] If I had looked at the magazines from business leadership, if I had looked at the rosters of boards of the United Way and all of that, what I would have realized is that that white male dominance, that Southern white male dominance, was a factor I was going to have to deal with.

Suber went on to acknowledge that in her case, it was actually white women in Raleigh who were the most supportive, or appreciative of her style and approach to leading the university, because "they were happy to see a woman who was willing to break out of the mold and say 'Here I am. Hear me roar'". In terms of being an outsider, Suber also talked about the basic, unspoken facts about the culture of Raleigh. She indicated it was also that she had limited roots in the state. She was from Florida, attended school in Virginia and Illinois, worked in Virginia at a Virginia school, and had only one real career position tied to North Carolina which was a year-long teaching position in Greensboro.

What I had to deal with was the push back from African Americans who were not used to this kind of African American person in that community- remembering that this is a community that has 1 African American councilman, 1 African American county commissioner, 1 African American legislator, and those (*italics for emphasis*) all rotate...[When we first were looking for money to help build the football stadium, which was during the period where the CIAA basketball tournament was still in Raleigh] we were the first black organization to ever ask for money out of the inter-local tax fund in

all those years because the Blacks in that community don't see themselves as viable players in that city. [When I pushed the chairman of the Chamber of Commerce on why the economic development conversation did not include leaders from Southeast Raleigh], he says to me "Well Dianne we don't know who the African American leadership is in Raleigh".

Bryan was initially introduced to the culture of the community, during her transition, however it was less direct. She was introduced to it through a warning from her sister. In the midst of her response to a question specific to gender, Bryan continued to talk about the culture:

My husband is white...He wasn't planning to come [down to NC with me] ...That wasn't the plan, but Molly [Broad, president of UNC System] persuaded me to have him come. She said, "You're going to need that support." I think in some ways it was a mistake because my sister warned me that people wouldn't like it. Black people wouldn't like it, and white people wouldn't like it. Also, too, I was the first black person who joined the Highland Country Club.

Bryan spoke throughout the interview about the significance of having underestimated or not considering the influence of the culture of the school or the community:

[I think many of my experiences and even the challenges can be attributed to] being female, but I think a lot of it was culture because North Carolina was becoming increasingly provincial. That's why they didn't want outsiders anymore. That's why when my successor came in...You noticed how they presented him? – "Home Again"?!

In retrospect Bryan shared that the most telling memory about the culture, came as a reflection on her first few days in the role as FSU's first woman chancellor:

(Closing out a comment about her last 100 days and the financial management staff still not having proper training) History kept repeating itself, and it was a campus culture. I remember when I was new, the chief of police said to me, when he picked me up on my first day of work, “Ma’am” he says, “You have gotten yourself in a mess and you don’t even know it”. I said “What do you mean?” He said, “You’re going to do things, and you’re going to have an impact on people who are connected to other people in ways that you’ll never know. You may do something, and you think it’s the right thing to do, and you’re going to make all these enemies, and you won’t know that you’ve made them because you don’t understand the connections” ... That was my first day, and he was right, and I didn’t know it... I was told [by Broad] I had to make changes, and make them fast... I had not anticipated that some of those changes were going to rock the boat in such a way. [I would give this as a lesson], know the culture of the place because, again, I’ve been in an HBCU before but those people at Coppin, even though they might have hated everything about Coppin, would have died before they would have told the press about what was going on.

Dr. Yancy’s revelation about the difference in culture was not as pointed as the experiences recalled by Bryan and Suber. Different from the other two women, Dr. Yancy did have a connection. She was not only an alumnae of the school she was chosen to lead, but had also accepted the interim president role as a current member of the JCSU Board of Trustee. Yet she specifically used the same terminology to describe her realization of people’s perception of her. She had this realization while she was fundraising to meet the goal of the capital campaign which was underway when she began in the role:

What I discovered was I that I was an outsider, even though I had graduated from Johnson C. Smith, I had never been there and the faculty and staff all saw me as an outsider...I was a Johnson C. Smith person in the eyes of the alumni. I had to explain to the business community that I was a product of Johnson C. Smith. They didn't see me as being there either. You had these different constituents that had different views of where you had come from because you had been somewhere else. I had not spent my life there and I had never worked there...I was considered to be an outsider; I had come from Georgia Tech.

Dr. Yancy talked about the "little things" in terms of campus culture that were an unexpected adjustment, and part of her discovery. In addition to the vast difference in the level of technological infrastructure, which she knew would be an area of focus, she mentioned things that most incoming presidents would not even consider:

My first surprise was when the Xerox machine didn't staple because they bought one that didn't staple, and it was brand new...Little things were the things that would bother me. I was accustomed, and I still did it, to typing my own letters, doing my own exams, making my own reservations, making me own phone calls, so there was very little for a secretary to do [for me]. I was out there making copies of something. The copy machine was right there where the secretary was sitting. I said, "Who bought this? Who would buy a machine that won't staple?" [The lady who bought it was standing there – the vice president] ...I learned that I had to watch what I said because they already decided I thought I was better than they were because I'd been at Georgia Tech 20 something years...I had to travel a lot and they used the travel agency. The woman didn't know what she was doing. I went to Minnesota. I left Minneapolis and I went to Columbus,

Indiana to a foundation. I got ready to go catch the plane to go to New York. They said, “There’s no plane that leaves here going to New York.” She had booked me out of Columbus, Ohio.... I went back to making my own reservations and...I bought my own tickets until I retired the last time from Shaw...I learned that our benches were so shallow they you can’t let people make your travel plans who never left the city limits. There’s no sense in getting mad with them. Just go on and do it.

One of the other campus culture versus campus culture differences Yancy faced was that of the limited exposure, not of administrative staff, but of faculty. She discovered faculty were did not attend conferences or institutes, although her predecessor had established a faculty development program and had it endowed. They also did not consider conferences that did not specifically target HBCUs. Some of it had to do with finances, another factor was lack of confidence in the contribution faculty from JCSU could make.

I had come out of an environment where you didn’t go to a program unless you were presenting. I had to learn that I had to send my folks to meetings even though they weren’t presenting because they had to get exposed so they could present.

Yancy proudly shared that as a result of her strategy and support JCSU has faculty participate in the Salzburg program every year she was at JCSU.

In the retelling of her story, Dr. Yancy’s first 100 days did not include as much reflection about the external challenges or the attempts to derail her efforts, as the stories told by the other presidents. Toward the end of the interview, she acknowledged that there were points where it felt as if she were under attack. What I found unique in her demeanor was her ability to push past the white noise, because she saw the bigger picture and more substantive goal. In her response during the interview to lessons learned she spoke about a time connected to getting the buy-in

and support from the employees. Her response expressed the environment, but also her innate method of getting the work at hand – done:

I walked right into the lion's den. If you could have an infrared, just imagine a porcupine, and you can't see all the stab wounds except for when you cut on the infrared light. I would have looked like a porcupine. I was stabbed, stabbed, stabbed, stabbed, stabbed. I just went right on my merry way, because I had come from a place where people beat people up all the time...I'm trying to remember some specifics [about the stabbings and when they occurred] ... You know, I don't really remember. I have a way of deciding what I'm going to remember and that was irrelevant, what they were doing because they had nothing to do with what the goals were, and what we were trying to do.

The transition periods for these women, and their first 100 days were more connected than they may be apparent at first review. The way in which the outgoing president exited, and the types of relationships he had, had an impact on the perception of these women, and were linked to the support or disdain for the potential of making a difference, or bringing the school out of crisis. Secondary data provided a back-drop not only of the conditions of the school, but also provided a sense of the extent to which the first-female president would have to approach building or repairing relationships.

Bryan followed an alumnus of the university who had been the first alumnus to lead the school who was asked to resign. She was left to deal with a broken relationship with a food service vendor, who had strong ties to the community; but she also was left to deal with unresolved staffing issues that had largely related to money issues, and audit findings. In her one meeting with the outgoing president Willis McCleod, he admitted to her that he should have terminated the head of institutional development, but didn't and that she would be advised to do



that in the early part of her tenure. Suber followed a short-termed president, who was recorded by the media as not ever having made the connection or relationships in the city. Even in the article about her being a finalist, the search committee chair alludes to the broken relationships. Lee (1999) quotes the search committee chair as saying “We need someone who is going to be able to pull different factions of the college together and move us beyond 2000. It looks like that leader is going to be a woman” (Lee, 1999, p. A4). Her predecessor left on his own but what prompted his search was the lack of support from the board, and excessively harsh treatment from the community. More poignantly, her predecessor Bernard Franklin, followed a 27-year seated president in Prezell Robinson, who was beloved in the community and on campus, but quietly had been forced out by the board of trustees. She faced open disdain from what she called “Robinson Loyals”, who believed they had been successful, in pushing Franklin to the point of seeking and accepting a position at another university in Virginia. Yancy, was potentially best situated in this cross case analysis for a smoother transition into the role, because followed a president Dr. Robert Albright, who left on his own to lead a prestigious private sector educational entity. The JCSU board insisted she shadow him for one whole month before he left before assuming the role as interim president. Albright met with Yancy, and left her a list of folks in the business and foundation community she needed to see immediately and ‘not wait’ because the relationships were crucial, and could not be unattended. He also told her of the one person on campus, who happened to be in the president’s office, who she had to keep employed. But she still had surprises during her transition period, and even in her first 100 days as the permanent president. In fact, she had unique challenges because her of extended transition period, there were those who attempted to place a pause on their relationships with JCSU during her transition period because she was only going to be the interim president.

Suber and Bryan both brought or elevated women to administrative positions, but Suber was the only president interviewed who brought that woman with her from the same former institution. While Bryan mused that perhaps it was to her detriment to elevate so many women, even reflecting on a comment made by a male administrator that “he could smell the estrogen as soon as he reached the top floor”, Suber considered that some of the push back she experienced many have been from bringing so many youthful administrators. She said she thinks those administrators may have offered too much change with too much energy in the process, and that in that environment people became uncomfortable and only passively supportive. In the reflection of her last 100 days, Suber also contends that there was a faction of those young administrators, who in their ambition, began to work with board members toward the alternative plan for growth of SAU.

### **Staying Too Long**

It was the governing boards of these HBCUs who seemed to have shifted the vision for the direction of these women, with what seemed to be no authentic intention to have these women be the person to move with the direction. Yet, each woman made a comment during their interviews that they had to see it through.

Every move of Bryan’s final days in the position, were published, and by her account she was “ousted”. She was given mixed messages, and actually lead to believe she would be given 60 days to correct some recurring issues, but was not so. Suber spoke in previous settings about having to finish the SAU football stadium, but in the interview for this study, she talked about securing a Cap Finance loan, and implementing the plan to combat the Parent Plus Loan situation which would stabilize enrollment. On April 4, 2014, her retirement announcement (effective May 30, 2014) was published in the *News & Observer*, and *hbcudigest.com*, immediately,

however the apparent goal to personally discredit her lead to the SAU board chairman making a statement that said “separate and independent of Dr. Suber’s decision to retire in May, the board has decided end her contract immediately” (R. Gaddy, personal communication, May 7, 2014). Yancy made the decision to leave on her own terms, announcing her retirement one year from the date of the announcement. The local media was kind in their publicity of her announcement. Her board did not counter or accelerate the process, but she too noted that having done more for the university’s well-being than she should have in that last year.

Yancy said “I had to finish SACS...I had to finish the campaign...[which I did and I announced all these things at the same time- SACS, the successful conclusion of the campaign and my retirement]...[but in that last year] I had to ensure the technology was all upgraded so that the school could continue to progress [and the infrastructure not be an issue again]. Bryan said “I thought I had more time. I was working to resolve the issues. The nursing [situation] had actually already been resolved before they told me [my time was up]. However, it was the following quote from Dianne Boardley Suber that may have been the greatest lesson shared, but not one that is readily found in the literature on the challenges of a college president. It echoed a comment made by T. J. Bryan about her tenure as an academic leader at Coppin State University.

I think you have to know when to leave. You have to understand and see the signs. I probably stayed a year too long. I had an opportunity to go and be president of another university, and I was the top contender. I pulled my name out because I had this misguided feeling that I was needed to finish some things at St. Aug before I left, when in fact, what I should’ve realized was that I wasn’t going to be given the opportunity to do that...My pride and tenacity to see a job through made me stay...I think you have to

really know when your capacity to positively impact an institution has come to an end, and you have to put that institution first, and make the decision to leave.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this chapter was to synthesis the data gathered while chronicling that data based on the specific time-bound period established for this study. Throughout the period of inquiry for this study, participants - through their own words, thoughts, and presentation of documentation gathered before, during, and in some instances after their respective tenure – have provided a more succinct representation of facts has been recorded. Each of the three women presidents arrived at institutions that could be identified as “in crisis;” but whereas Drs. Bryan and Suber left under political fire, Dr. Yancey left on her own terms, after a significant milestone.

The women interviewed for the study all were preceded and succeeded by men. Throughout their interviews covering the span of their tenure, none of these woman contributions that would remotely been considered “invisible or less visible”. In fact, in some regard, it was the national recognition, the visibility of the results of the implementation of their vision, that gained these presidents, and the institutions under their leadership, praise, but also garnered the most local scrutiny.

To put the realization of the impact of culture into context, it is important to recap the transition periods for each woman. Dr. Bryan was offered the job one month before she started. She did have a meeting with the outgoing president, and he had given her a ceremonious tour of the office prior to that meeting. In Suber’s case, she was announced in October 1999, had one-day welcome ceremony in early December, but did not begin until January 2000; she never had a transition meeting with the outgoing president, and her predecessor’s predecessor was still on

faculty at the college. Dr. Yancy had a one-month transition into the role as Interim President, with the outgoing president still in place. She then served as Interim for eight months before being selected as president. Bryan and Suber's reflections revealed, perhaps a common misnomer or assumption that the success of a leadership approach or been in leadership in an HBCU means one understands another HBCU. This is not so. That assumption left them slightly unprepared, or as Suber stated, it deprived them of the choice to accept the culture. Having an awareness of this perception may have caused them to use the transition period getting to know the culture of the internal and external community.

In the following chapter, the researcher will attempt to make sense of the experiences of three African-American women who served as the first women to lead three HBCUs in North Carolina.

## CHAPTER 5: THE CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of black women who served as the first female president of a historically black college or university between 1994 and 2014 - a time when there was a significant rise in the selection of women to lead HBCUs. The women targeted for the study were all chosen to lead schools that were in crisis. The three women who participated in the study were all chosen to lead schools located in North Carolina. As a researcher, though North Carolina was not part of the original inclusion criteria, there was a historical context of black women firsts at colleges in that state, that provided for a rich sampling of participants and the potential for cross-analysis of those women's experiences.

Why would any African-American woman want this job? HBCUs are not under any more scrutiny than other higher education institutions, but they are uniquely situated in the higher education history as schools in crisis. Based on the populations they serve, and the consistent charge to prove their worth and competitiveness, traditional and even innovative funding opportunities, coupled with changes in federal regulations, tend to have a greater impact on these institutions, and their leadership teams. There are also an increasingly high number of vacancies over the last few years at these institutions, as long-standing male presidents retire, or move on to other career opportunities. In the months leading up to my interviews, four first-woman HBCU presidents, all of whom had served relatively short terms, had been terminated or resigned. Thus adding four more vacancies in the top position. In her 2016 on-line news article, deGregory listed 11 black women who were selected as the first woman to lead an HBCU since 2013. At the time of print of the article *Where have all the black women HBCU presidents gone?* nine of those presidents were no longer serving in the role, all having left under scrutiny, and a tenth woman had retired (she assumed the role at 83 years old). Finally, one of the 11 women selected,

my chancellor- Dr. Debra Saunders White, who notably raised the profile of North Carolina Central University in the 3-years she was at the helm, passed away. Each departure does more than just add to the number of vacancies in HBCU leadership. Those occurrences as well as similarly situated occurrences of other black women presidents whose stories were more spaced in time, beg the question of why, it seems women were selected and accepted the charge to lead HBCUs? More specific to my study, was what happened to the support as the school began to transition out of crisis, and what emerged as commonalities in those experiences that may help to decrease the revolving vacancies at these institutions, and help to reestablish real stability of these institutions

This chapter will look to interpret or find meaning in the narratives of three women who were the first to lead a historically black college or university, using definitive time-bound periods of their respective tenures. As “nearly all qualitative studies...contain information about the actions and attitudes of individual participants” (Yin, 2015, p. 235), each woman had her own experience, and none of the participants were symmetrically situated in their tenure or institution. The findings were neither universal, nor were they completely void of striking similarities. This work is a significant addition in the area of higher education leadership and governance. As research on decision making and governance of HBCUs is “virtually non-existent” and the “drastic change [in terms of] governance issues remain understudied” (Minor, 2004, p. 41), this study adds to this literature that is limited, findings and emerging themes across the narratives of Drs. T. J. Bryan, Dianne Boardley Suber, and Dorothy Cowser Yancy, as they assumed the role as chief executive of three HBCUs located in the state of North Carolina. First, I will consider their experiences within the existent literature under sub- headers of The Calling, Pathways to and Challenges of the University Presidency, and Black Men and Sister

Presidents. I also consider emergent themes of discovery, phenome of the media, and the significance of prevailing climate. Finally, I will consider the conceptual framework of the glass cliff, whether and to what extent it frames the experiences of these women.

## **Reframing the Literature**

### **The Calling**

Bower and Wolverton (2009) and Cole (1993) delved into the concept of the sense of calling, and the tendency for women in leadership to see beyond doing a job for the sake of doing a job. The idea of calling was framed to suggest that as black women educating predominantly black students at HBCUs some greater responsibility exists beyond just ensuring that students are meeting standards of classroom learning outcomes. Perhaps one of the articles reviewed that most closely matches the exploration of the experiences of the first woman to lead an institution, is Sotello Viernes Turner's (2007) study. Her results indicated that three women interviewed who were the first women of color (Mexican, Asian and Native American respectively) to lead four-year colleges were not seeking presidencies, but rather looking for senior leadership roles where they could make a significant contribution and impact on a type of institution with which they connected. Similarly, none of my study's participants moved through their careers seeking a presidency. Each in some way were prompted to apply for the presidency/chancellorship. That indicates that someone else saw a level of successful performance and acumen toward leadership in them. Each woman talked about a career of commitment to developing students prior to assuming the role of president. Bryan and Suber's experiences with student development had been at historically black colleges, but Suber also worked from that sense of calling to develop and expose black children as young as kindergarten. The calling to do this work does not develop once appointed to the role of president. Leading



faculty and staff that may not be interested in change, or staff that has only had the experience of being at only one school e.g. alumni-turned-employee, takes a level of motivation for the outcome that is generated by more than a generalized drive to succeed. Yancy specifically noted her record accomplishments with faculty development and enhancing teaching and learning through technology, but her stories were always followed by an example whereby the faculty development served as a launching pad of success, and exposure for the JCSU student. When conducting or considering the selection of African-American women to lead these institutions, it's critical to consider the how the candidate gives meaning to success and in that context, to consider her professional success rate of achieving in similar environments, within similar populations, in the field of education. The calling was evident in the participants' approach to the work, which created a foundation for how to set an implementable vision.

Holmes (2004), and Lewis (2011) talked about style as a factor in the success of women leaders. Bryan, Suber and Yancy's vision included changes in the infrastructure, curriculum or both, that would position their respective school to address unique needs in the labor market. They each described a collaborative and inclusive style throughout their tenure. Across experiences, the recollection of their milestones and pivotal points during their tenure, each woman discussed Southern Association of Colleges and Schools accreditation, and special accreditation for programs like education, business, nursing and social work. But each woman spoke of those experiences under the umbrella of student success and exposure – evidence of calling. Each woman interviewed talked not only about leading the development of curriculum but about specific opportunities and points of exposure for their students. Each provided some evidence of how their students learned things outside the classroom that allowed them to progress beyond graduation. It seemed their accomplishments in setting and executing their

vision, had as an outcome of success, the success and readiness of their students-as-graduates. Their implementation of and drive to push the vision despite challenges internal to the university, and its periphery, could be more ascribed to the call toward continuous and sustainable growth, and less about self-gratification or edification.

Part of the scrutiny of HBCUs is their relevance, and at the same time their positioning in higher education as institutions who offer accessible education. In order to stabilize these institutions, the leaders have to be able to see beyond today, to put themselves aside and direct teams of people who can prepare HBCU students beyond graduation. Presidents at HBCUs have to have past experiences using available resources, inclusive of the willingness to access their own networks to graduate a student who has a sense of self, and has developed a level of confidence and competence to compete. Graduates ability to compete adds to the national profile of the institution- the leader has to be one who has that at the forefront of the vision.

### **Pathways to and Challenges of the College Presidency**

As it is already non-traditional for women to assume the presidency, taking a non-traditional route may diminish acceptance for what may already be deemed as a risky hire (Curry, 2000). Results from Cook's (2012) American Council on Education (ACE) study of the U.S. college presidency, indicated very little change in the presidential career path over a 25-year span. Most college presidents reported moving up through careers in higher education, and this was especially true of women presidents. Where there was growth in the numbers of men from non-traditional routes, women traversed more traditional pathways, which may speak to the acceptance of women at the helm. What's more significant about my study participants' professional paths to the presidency were the similarities in the kinds of experiences they had that were transferable, and yet there was a uniqueness in each one's experience, including their

personal early childhood experiences that framed their sense of their own leadership abilities. All three participants had spent time in leadership roles in higher education, but Dr. Suber had spent more of her career outside of the academy. That worked for and against her as a president of a HBCU, because in her leadership repertoire was an aptitude toward advocacy and pushing the envelope on students' ability to perform and be included beyond the statistics of socio-economic status.

Two of the three specifically spoke about lessons they acquired informally studying behaviors of strong male presidents - black and white- at institutions from which they came. This speaks to the importance of having substantive experiences, and access to those who have been in the role. When I talk about their pathway to leadership as it relates to the influence of these male presidents, please note I did not use the word "mentor" because these participants did not refer to their respective presidents (or really identify any other person during the interview) as their "mentor", but rather would indicate things they learned from "watching". Their description of their relationships with the male presidents to whom they reported was more that of a sponsor, particularly for one woman whose president prompted her to seek a presidency as her next move.

Lewis (2011) looked at institutional culture as a factor in decision-making and shared governance at a historically black college or university. Lewis' study focused on faculty and only lightly explored the question of culture, and how that culture impacted the involvement of faculty in the decision making process, and the impact on the perception of success for an institution and its president. The presidents interviewed who had spent extensive portions of their career as faculty were intentional in their engagement of faculty in planning, but also offered evidence of how the investment in faculty development, shaped the image and raised the national profile their schools.

Institutional culture has been noted throughout the literature as a challenge to leadership across industries. However, I would argue in educational institutions, institutional culture is particularly challenging for a black female college president. That challenge presents itself in a myriad of ways, and in various facets of the operation of a university.

### **Black Men and Sister Presidents**

Bond (2011), and Kaba (2005) subscribe to the idea that as the Black woman in America has progressed, and made significant gains in status, inclusive of a shift in attaining senior positions in education, those accomplishments appear to be at the expense of Black men. Cole (1993) considered sexism and racism as parallel challenges for Black women, and reflected on experiences where she said the most damaging encounters for Black women occurred through their engagement with Black men. That inference was evident in my findings through descriptors of institutional culture. The literature considered race and gender “institutionally” in a broader context, but it was evident in each of the lived experiences of my study participants, that challenges raised regarding perception of these women’s skills and abilities was raised by black men within the governance structure. Even more apparent was the challenge to the women’s authority that was initiated by men, and in two of the instances, specifically black men. In some scenarios, possible derailment of the African-American woman in the president’s seat came at the expense or detriment of the school. Each participant identified men who were in power, or who wanted to be in power whose behavior was the alternative of supportive.

To provide balance each woman also talked about black men that were critical to points of success for them as well. These women did not see themselves as being in competition with men, as they were most driven by the calling to improve, stabilize, and raise the profile of the institution, far beyond the gratification of raising themselves. Black men in many instances

served as allies. Many of the milestones celebrated by these women, were those resulting from true collaborative efforts with male directors, coaches, vice presidents and vision-minded board members that yielded significant wins for the institution. It is not always a zero-sum game; black women do not advance at the expense of black men, and there are men who see the strategic benefit of working with or following a woman who is a visionary or has a genuine commitment to people and students of color (Cole & Guy-Sheftall, 2009). Black women are not intentionally competing with black men but rather must contend with both race and class, with an additional level of burden of gender (Malveux as cited in Bond, 2011). As was the case with the participants, they often work to strike a balance in the work toward uplift, inclusive of their co-educational student populations, even if the result was a career transition out of the top role.

### **Emerging Themes - Discovery, Media and Culture**

What is missing in the literature perhaps because there are limited stories told or collected on black female college presidents, is the actual experience of discovery, and the impact of the unknown. This was an unexpected theme that emerged. Bryan's words, upon review of her initial interview notes, spoke volumes about this experience of discovery:

As I reviewed the transcript, I was struck by the frequency with which I did not know things that would have helped me to retain my position...One of the greatest dangers that chancellors and presidents face is that people hide so much from them.

#### **Discovery- The Not Knowing**

Every leader will experience a learning curve when assuming a new position, even at the same institution. However, it may be the case that women are more greatly penalized for not knowing what they don't know, and for not acquiring that knowledge at some unrealistically accelerated rate (Fenwick & Hutton, 2000; Rhode, 2003). Discovery was a common thread in the

initial experiences of the three women interviewed. Each participant discovered that “what was presented on paper” during the interview process was not the actual state of affairs.

Discovery was a repeated theme as it related to the essential functions of the university including financial status of the university, inefficiencies in policies and procedures including of athletic and student affairs policies, and designation of decision-making power. Something that was missing in the review of literature was the grave impact of the conditions of the facilities, and the discovery of lack of technological infrastructure. One specific discovery was uncovering information that the current strategic plan, had not made its way down to faculty and administrative staff who were presumably implementing it. For women, that not knowing is more attributable to their gender as opposed to being a normal part of leadership, which impacts their efforts to make decisions, and changes. The ascription of not knowing being a symptom of their womanhood also subjects women leaders to higher scrutiny and results in less favorable reviews and evaluations.

### **Phenomenon of Influence of Media**

Each woman discussed a phenomenon of the influence or the role of the media, but in particular that of the local newspaper. Gasman (2007) examined this issue looking at the media influence and coverage of one specific HBCU. The phenomenon seemed more significant in the retelling of these three women’s experiences over a collective 20-year time span. It was eye-opening how the local media influenced the perception of their leadership, and their ability, creating challenges with building rapport and making shifts on campus, and repositioning the school. Bryan and Suber had more stories related to media challenges than Yancy. However, Yancy provided as secondary data for my review, a letter sent to her, along with copies of the

positive articles that had been written about her successes, from renown publisher Rolfe Neill, of the *Charlotte Observer*, with whom she had built a rapport. The letter read as follows:

Dear Dorothy...Kiddo-You done done it! What a joy to watch you raise the academic achievements and JCSU aspirations over nearly two decades. And you don't need to apologize for not being "Miss Charlotte Civic". That was the problem with some of your predecessors who confused being well known with the job they were hired to do, which went unfulfilled!

Enclosed courtesy of *The Charlotte Observer* are photocopies of your farewell story and editorial.... (R. Neill, personal communication, July 2, 2008).

The inference in this letter is that there were other articles written, and perhaps other media coverage that set out to discount Yancy's accomplishments, because she worked unapologetically in a way that would "build a school", and not necessarily in a way that would endear her to the people of Charlotte. This letter also gives support to the notion that Yancy was working to build the school and enhance the life experiences of its students – not to build her reputation.

### **Significance of Prevailing Climate**

The sentiment in Neill's writings is reflective of the third emerging theme in the narratives of these three women who were the first to lead an HBCU. Each woman discussed the significance of culture or prevailing climate in their experiences. Howard-Hamilton and Patitu (2012) point out that 86% of the 201 black female administrators they interviewed stated that knowledge of organizational culture was very important in the fulfillment of their responsibilities (p. 88). Their study also drew meaning from various responses connecting the concept of being respected, and the ability to think outside the box and beyond the organizational culture.

Therefore, it seems likely that the foundation for implementation of innovative initiatives, hinges on one's ability to be respected, and one's ability to implement a strategy for success, hinges on the ability to build relationships. The more alike two entities are, the more likely those entities are to work together. In Suber's (1996) study on first-time superintendents, her findings revealed one of the greatest influences for first-year superintendents was that of the prevailing climate in the district where they were expected to push an agenda and make improvements. I am going to challenge the norm of the idea of institutional culture and posit that there is a difference, and limitation of that terminology. Institutional culture negates the addition and blending of the campus culture and that of the area, district or location of the college campus. As black women presidents of HBCUs, their accountability and need to be able to build rapport and set an agenda goes beyond the gates of the university. That need is impacted by a prevailing climate that is inclusive but not mutually exclusive of the campus community. The significance of prevailing climate was not as evident in the reviewed literature as other factors of success for black college presidents, but served as a constant backdrop in two of the three narratives. However, each woman used or described their initial experiences as that of being "an outsider". How quickly one adjusts to the prevailing climate seemed to make the difference in the speed with which the first-female president was able to make strides, build relationships and get things moving in a stronger direction, or in how quickly she stalled out.

### **The Glass Cliff**

The glass cliff concept is the idea that in comparison to men, women are selected to lead institutions or organizations in precarious situations, or that are in crisis. I would argue that happened with these women, though there was more supporting evidence provided through Bryan and Suber's stories. Bowen and Shapiro (1998), and Holmes (2004) looking at the success



of the presidency, noted relationships with external entities as important. Holmes (2004) interviewed African-American presidents who had lead both HBCUs and predominantly white institutions. A first-time female president in her study discussed her apprehension about challenges in relationship building because of the employee experiences with her predecessor – who was a black male. My findings related to the significance of the prevailing climate, indicated that the extent to which the president understood and was able to adapt to that climate impacted or influenced the relationship building process. Each woman president entered relationships, and was introduced to existing relationships differently. All three woman discovered financial issues that were different than those presented during the interview and transition periods, and each had to deal with accreditation matters. Issues found through unexpected discovery further solidified the institution’s identity of being in crises or in major transition, and had a potential lasting impact on the president’s reputation associated with making staffing changes that had to be addressed in order to bring the institutions into compliance and move to a place of stability.

In my study, if I consider the relationships of the predecessor, what was learned during discovery and the impact of the prevailing climate as the set-up for success or failure for each first-woman president at a HBCU, there is credence to considering these experiences through the conceptual framework of the glass cliff, and there is support for considering this conceptual theory in future studies related to the black women’s leadership at HBCUs. Each school was characterized as being at a point of major transition, or met the criteria of a school in crisis. This study added to the data regarding this concept. None of the participants attributed their experiences in the first 100 days to the factor of their gender independently or explicitly, without the prompt. Nor were their initial thoughts ones of being intentionally set up for failure.

However, in the retelling of their stories, there were three common themes that emerged as each participant reflected on her first 100 days – discovery, the role of the local media, and the significance of the prevailing climate. As well as the lack of expedient board support to rally around these women as they progressed through the school’s existing challenges. In each case, the discovery and prevailing climate were the facets most prevalent in the outcomes of the first 100 days. If one were to consider the points at which the discoveries had the potential to derail the presidents’ success, one could argue that a more thorough institutional preparation process, as well as a more intentionally structured transition period could have saved each woman from unnecessary missteps in the beginning of her tenure. Prevailing climate includes existing relationships, and could potentially be mitigated by how the president was “introduced” to the environment.

To be clear, there are risks to being black while leading (Knight, Hebl, Foster, & Mannix, 2003). But to be black and a woman there is more risk. There are heightened problems and a greater risk of rejection when someone appears to be “different” in some capacity whether gender, race, class or some other category (Rhode, 2003). Though a structured transitional process could also have addressed matters of prevailing climate, my findings regarding the significance of prevailing climate may be better interpreted by aspiring women college presidents as something to deeply investigate and consider before climbing up on the cliff/racing to the top. In this study, Dr. Yancy’s experience may appear as the outlier as it relates to the glass cliff, but in her first 100 days as the permanent president, she had to contend with a board chairman that was not supportive, and counter-productive, yet she stabilized the institution, raised its profile, and then was forced to hire a second in command by her third board chairman. The difference in the retelling of her story, can be linked back to calling. One does not describe

an experience as being repeatedly “stabbed”, yet consider it an environment primed for acceptance and success.

In the retelling of their lived experiences it was an overly involved governing board that created some of the most pivotal moments in these first-woman presidents’ tenures, inclusive of the moments the decision was made for the tenure to end. Often that governing board was comprised of the same people who selected the woman with purported full support and expectations of being the right pick to move the school forward. There are striking parallels in Suber’s experiences at Saint Augustine’s University, with the board interference in Williamson’s (2004) research on now-non-existent Campbell College, and the way in which the freedom of private HBCUs made them a gift to the Civil Rights Movement but also made those private college’s leadership a target for groups that did not want to see growth or systematic change. Is it possible, given the recent history of the SAU presidency that Suber was brought in because her successes, because she was uniquely qualified for the challenge, without the selection committee considering and therefore preparing her for the greater influence of prevailing climate? In her retelling of her story, it appeared that when the governing body itself was not successful in containing the school’s unexpected growth under her leadership, the external entities found a way to contain it, from the inside and alleviate her from her seat at the table.

Is it not a glass cliff scenario when a woman is hired to lead a school in crisis, and once she has solidified a place for the school among its peer institutions, pulled the school- out of crisis, the powers that be find reason for her no longer to be in the lead? Each of these women did what they were told they were brought to their respective colleges to do. Perhaps, they did it too well.

## **Conclusion**

From the onset of this research, at least nine of the first-time, first black women presidents at HBCUs had left their positions under duress, having served terms of less than five years, which is a vast difference from the traditionally long tenures seen historically in the HBCU presidency. Where there have been permanent replacements, those replacements have been men. In many of the scenarios enrollment was stabilizing, the facilities were updated, upgraded or newly constructed, and academic programs were added to or enhanced as a result of the woman's leadership.

Women in leadership tend to have variations in the meaning of success and how it is defined, however the truth is that even women in leadership across industry have set for them more traditional measures of success like profit, size and growth (Rhodes, 2003). As was the case with the women in this study, insiders say the schools were in crisis, but as the literature suggests, HBCUs are one type of institution in American higher education that have consistently been in crisis, though it may not appear so on paper. These women hit all the marks in what is considered traditional successful, moving the schools out of crisis in the areas of fundraising and grant attainment (profit), enrollment (size) and implementation and accreditation of new programs and curriculum that position the institutions competitively (growth). Yet they still left under some level of duress.

Vacancies at HBCUs are being filled by women, and in more recent years, being filled by women (and men) closer to 40 than 58. The average tenure has decreased to 10 years, but as Kimbrough (2014) pointed out has been as low as 3. Consider that each woman responded to the inquiry about their first 100 days and the last 100 days. Consider also that each woman recalled milestones, and pivotal moments often in the context of successes for the school occurring

outside of the first 100, and last 100 days. It would stand to reason that it would take more than 3 years for a school to move from crisis, to stability, to flourishing. Those extremely short tenures are not common and are out of sync with the average tenure for HBCUs and for predominantly white institution presidents as well.

Women being hired into impossible scenarios, continues to suggest an ulterior motive in their selection. In the case of the only public HBCU in Florida, and a land-grant university in Alabama, some would argue the woman selected entered an impossible situation where either a series of short-term presidents had not been able to solidify or enforce policy (versus practice), or where the board -widely advertised with the help of the media- before day-one, set out to remind the president that, regardless of past successes, she was to remember the role (and restrictions) of being a woman.

Each of this study's participants revealed that discovery – the money, facilities, and faculty preparedness to move the college forward, was not part of any full disclosure offered during the interview or transition periods. It is admirable to intentionally break a glass ceiling and select a black woman to lead a historically black college, but it unrealistic to expect that a person who is inheritably different than the prevailing climate to accept the challenge of the role without full disclosure of that which she will have to deal. One cannot be expected to course correct an institution with a history of financial issues that were not managed under the previous administrator, and be expected to do so in less time than it took the situation to reach critical mass.

Both Bryan and Suber's narratives include significant references to the "not knowing, and discovery" and the significance of researching the more than just the campus community. The findings add this condition of prevailing climate to the literature, as it was not in just

researching the campus and its programs that was helpful in the transition period, but the social norms and historical relationships of the institution with the geographic location that is critical as well. I am intentionally challenging the normative language of the literature to make a distinction between a generalized institutional culture and the idea of the prevailing climate. The prevailing climate is inclusive of existing relationships and how the president was introduced to the environment, and even how the predecessor and his exit was perceived and managed. Birnbaum (1988) talked about subcultures and coupling. All three women's experiences support Birnbaum's descriptors of two specific prevailing campus culture – that of *locals* or that of *cosmopolitan*. All three came from campus cultures that would have most closely resembled Birnbaum's description of a cosmopolitan culture, and quickly learned that that cosmopolitan persona followed them, and added to the perception of these women as “outsiders”. When a selected candidate, regardless of gender is prepared for the prevailing climate, even they have the opportunity to consider their own skill level and calling and determine not only if they are a good fit for the goals of the school, but if the school and community are a good fit for what they are able to do. Knowledge of prevailing climate and a board's intentional effort to prepare a woman for discoveries, also helps her devise a strategy for relationship building with a growing potential ally or foe – the media.

The accomplishments of milestones in their first 100 days, and then throughout their tenure, occurred amidst strategies of “rolling up their sleeves” and doing the work with their respective faculty and staff.

The boards of trustees continue to be an ever present distraction in the accomplishments of, and sustainability of historically black colleges. Schools spend resources to select board members that will add to the success and provide a level of support and visibility for these

institutions, but it seems the board composition has demonstrated an added burden for black female college presidents. The board's agenda is often in conflict with the prescribed goals and objectives set out by the selection committee, and often there are internal factions that were unmanaged that hinder the forward movement and stability of these institutions. Who is the puppeteer and who are the marionettes? Who is really in charge? What are the goals of those who make the selection, boast of being forward thinking in moving women through the ceiling, all the while knowing they have set these women up to fall off the cliff? HBCUs have a distinct place in American higher education, yet those who are making decisions about its leadership, seem to be doing so ignoring the ramifications, of alienating the exact women – black women – who have proven successful in solidifying that place in recent history. There are women who have managed to stabilize, build and grow. This study was only able to tell the story of three of those women. There are many more, and only they can tell their real stories.

### **Limitations**

The strategy of narrative inquiry is based on the individual stories of the participants. With “restorying” there is a limitation of chronological sequencing, in which memories are recalled out of sequence. Another element of narrative inquiry is that participants’ retelling of life events is shaped by the storyteller’s memory, and the perception of those events. In an effort to account for those elements, I used secondary data, including real-time newspaper articles and articles in established educational leadership journals to support the stories told by each participant. I also reviewed official documents share with me directly from each participant. I consulted the universities’ annual report where it was available. I also considered the tone or slant of news articles to verify the participants’ recollection of the role the local media played in telling stories about their contributions or shortfalls during their tenure.

I gathered the stories of three women who served as the first woman president at an HBCU, which all were in North Carolina. I had each participant review a transcript of the interview, make edits to clarify meaning, and consulted with each woman at least once in follow-up as I recorded my findings. Two women supplied additional written comments, with permission for me to use those as well to draw meaning from their experiences. I do not suggest that three narratives were enough for generalizability, but do posit it was a starting point for further research. Each woman's story was not the same and an argument could be made that not all stories seemed congruent for interpretation through the glass cliff concept. What these narratives provided was enough similarity to suggest their experiences have multiple points of inter-sectionality that could be considered by those interested in pursuing this career path.

Conducting this study aroused my own thoughts and feelings about the experiences of these women, particularly during their last 100 days. As I was present for the final days of Dr. Suber's tenure, I intentionally referred solely to her accounts, those of the newspaper, and heavily relied on what I was able to extract from over 12 documents related to communication between she and her board, and even referenced the preparatory documents she willingly provided of the gender-discrimination case she lodged against the university. Finally, during this process, as I stated above, my own chancellor – Dr. Debra Saunders White passed away. Dr. Yancy called me to tell me of my obligation to the university as a black female administrator on that campus -first, and *told* (italics for emphasis) me that I would not fly to Atlanta to interview her the week of Saunders White's passing, that I *would* be present on campus and then in Virginia for the final services. This experience added to the meaning I was able to make for myself as I traverse through leadership as a black woman at an HBCU, considering the multiplicity of the role of an administrator.



### **Implications for Future Research**

The transition period proved to be critical, and the way in which the transition was structured may have made a difference for the president whose board saw a benefit in requiring there to be a transition between she and her predecessor. But the first 100 days still included a great deal of discovery, which presented a great deal of challenges. Further consideration could be given to the variance in transition periods in the preparation for the first year of a presidency of an HBCU.

Each narrative provides support to using the concept of the glass cliff in the research of black women in senior leadership positions in education. The conceptual framework has been primarily used in the research of governmental and business organizations. However, another aspect of potential research is looking at the conditions of the universities that seemed to thrive under the leadership of black women in comparison to the conditions of the same schools under a male successor.

This study provides a foundation for future research related to the length of HBCU presidential tenures. As I listened to the accolades about what Dr. Saunders White was able to accomplish in 3 years at the helm of NCCU, I began to think through tenure terms, and what it looks like to either have the support of the board chairman, or at least have a board chair that is manageable, and wants to see the institution thrive more than they want to see the president not succeed. There is definitely a study that could be conducted on black women and their boards.

One could consider possible correlations to time-spent-in-role with the implementation of strategic planning outcomes (which are typically set for 5-year cycles) designed to elevate a historically black college or university out of crisis, since most of the women hired as the first woman to lead began in 2011, and most of those women are no longer in the role as of 2017. Of

the women selected as the first woman to lead an HBCU between 1994-2014, several started in 2011 or beyond; at the time of my study those women did not meet the inclusion criteria because they had not experienced their last 100 days. Unfortunately, there are now several other possible participants for studies conducted by researchers looking to draw meaning from the experiences of a black woman who was first to lead an HBCU.

The greatest portion of those experiences missing in the literature is the recorded lived experiences of those women's last 100 days. At the beginning of my research, I selected five women. One woman went on to another presidency, so her willingness to be candid diminished greatly. The other woman, upon learning that the scope of my research would include the last 100 days of her tenure, had to decline participation because of the confidentiality terms of her separation.

Researchers must be diligent if the story is to be told, because many of the stories are intentionally being stifled, silenced, or perhaps more detrimental to the field of higher education, erased. One of the presidents categorized HBCUs as either surviving, appearing to thrive or thriving- that indicates the need to hire a president with either the skillset in of stabilization, foundation rebuilding or growing. For HBCU graduates to have the benefit of a school that is growing, it takes a president a full accreditation cycle, and at the very least requires a president be given the support and leeway to recruit a class, grow the class, and see the results of those graduates' accomplishments one year beyond graduation. Student persistence and completion rates are recorded with a margin of up to 6 years. I think black women are owed at least that.

## REFERENCES

- Allen, W. R., & Jewel, J. O. (2002). A backward glance forward: Past, present, and future perspectives on historically Black colleges and universities. *Review of Higher Education*, 25(3), 241-261.
- Altman, S. (1997). *The encyclopedia of African-American heritage*. New York: Facts on File, Inc. Retrieved from [http://www.aaregistry.org/historic\\_events/view/st-agnes-hospital-north-carolina-opens](http://www.aaregistry.org/historic_events/view/st-agnes-hospital-north-carolina-opens)
- Anderson, J. D. (1988). Training the apostles of liberal culture: Black higher education, 1900-1935. Reprinted from *The Education and the Rise of Blacks in the New South, 1860-1935*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- AP. (2014, May 20). Bobcats officially become Hornets in Charlotte. Retrieved from <http://www.nba.com/2014/news/05/20/charlotte-hornets-back.ap/>
- Avery, S. (2009). Taking the pulse of historically black colleges. *Academic Questions*, 22(3), 327-339. doi:<http://dx.doi.org.jproxy.lib.ecu.edu/10.1007/s12129-009-9116-8>
- Bensimon, E. M. (1989). A feminist reinterpretation of presidents' definitions of leadership. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 66(3), 143-156.
- Birnbaum, R. (1988). *How colleges work: The cybernetics of academic organization and leadership* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass pp. 20-85
- Birnbaum, R., & Edelson, P. J. (1989). *How colleges work: The cybernetics of academic organization and leadership*. pp. 75-90

- Bond, H. (2011). Black females in higher education at HBCUs: The paradox of success. *Support Systems and Services for Diverse Populations: Considering the Intersection of Race, Gender, and the Needs of Black Female Undergraduates* (pp. 131-144). Emerald Group Publishing Limited
- Bowen, W. G., & Shapiro, H. T. (Eds.). (1998). *Universities and their leadership*. Princeton University Press.
- Bower, B. L., & Wolverton, M. (2009). *Answering the call: African American women in higher education leadership*. Stylus Publishing, LLC
- Breneman, D. W. (1994). *Liberal arts colleges: Thriving, surviving, or endangered?*. Brookings Institution Press. Washington, DC.
- Broussard, W., & Hilton, A. (2016, August 31). The unseen casualties of HBCU executive departures. *HBCU Digest*. Retrieved from <https://hbcudigest.com/the-unseen-casualties-of-hbcu-executive-departures-b556e1b4c658#.pob6flrh7>
- Brown, II, M. C., & Freeman, K. (Eds.). (2004). *The state of research on black colleges: An introduction. Black colleges: new perspectives on policy and practice*. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers. pp. xi-xiv
- Brown, O., & Heintze, M. R. (n.d.). "Mary Branch: Private College Educator," in *Texas State Historical Association On-line Handbook*. Retrieved from: <https://tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/fbray>
- Carroll, W., Hennessey, S. M., & MacDonald, R. (2013). Is there a "glass cliff?": Examining the phenomena using board of director appointments in Canada. Allied Academies International Conference. *Academy of Organizational Culture, Communications and Conflict Proceedings*, 18(2), 9-13.

- Carter, J. (2016, May 17). What's in a name? *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jarrett-l-carter/whats-in-a-name-for-north\\_b\\_9991240.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jarrett-l-carter/whats-in-a-name-for-north_b_9991240.html)
- Chambers, C., & Hilton, A. (2016). *Post-racial already? Desegregation and interest divergence in a small liberal arts college, 1990-2010*. Unpublished manuscript, Department of Educational Leadership, East Carolina University, Greenville, North Carolina.
- Cole, J. B. (1993). *Straight talk with America's sister president*. Doubleday: New York.
- Cole, J. B., & Guy-Sheftall, B. (2009). *Gender talk: The struggle for women's equality in African American communities*. One World. pp. 24-73.
- Collins, P. H. (2000). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment*. New York: Routledge, p. 99.
- Cook, B. J. (2012, Spring). The American college study: Key findings and takeaways. *American Council for Education Spring Supplement*. Retrieved from <http://www.acenet.edu/the-presidency/columns-and-features/Pages/The-American-College-President-Study.aspx>
- Cook, B. J., & Cordova, D. I. (2007). Minorities in higher education: Twenty-second annual status report: 2007 supplement. pp. 2-3. Retrieved from <http://narrative-corrective-action-creative-investment%E2%80%9494remarks-secretary-arne-duncan-hbcu-symposium-north-carolina-central-university-centennial>
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4<sup>th</sup> ed). Los Angeles: Sage. pp. 24-27, 111-142.
- Curry, B. K. (2000). *Women in power: Pathways to leadership in education*. Teachers College Press.
- Denzin, N. K. (1989). *Interpretive biography* (Vol. 17). Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA.

- Duncan, A. (2010). Changing the HBCU narrative: From corrective action to creative investment. Retrieved from: <https://www.ed.gov/news/speeches/changing-hbcu>
- Diverse Staff Reporter. (2008, January 15). In brief: ACE names first woman president. *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, para. 4.
- Duval, A. (2002, August 1). FSUs chancellor to resign. *The Fayetteville Observer*. Retrieved from [http://www.fayobserver.com/news/local/fsu-s-chancellor-to-resign/article\\_48952fca-ec0a-5922-9c41-9966cf08ec45.html](http://www.fayobserver.com/news/local/fsu-s-chancellor-to-resign/article_48952fca-ec0a-5922-9c41-9966cf08ec45.html)
- Duval, A. (n.d.). Board should conduct study on potential name change. *The Fayetteville Observer*. Retrieved from [http://www.fayobserver.com/news/local/board-study-should-come-from-within/article\\_ed97de38-bcc0-5c12-9a79-7d96d49c40a6.html](http://www.fayobserver.com/news/local/board-study-should-come-from-within/article_ed97de38-bcc0-5c12-9a79-7d96d49c40a6.html)
- Erlandson, D. A. (1993). *Doing naturalistic inquiry: A guide to methods*. Sage. pp. 24, 144-146.
- Esters, L. L., & Strayhorn, T. L. (2013). Demystifying the contributions of public land-grant historically black colleges and universities: Voices of HBCU presidents. *Negro Educational Review*, 64(1), 119-135. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.jproxy.lib.ecu.edu/docview/1461359893?accountid=10639>
- Fain, P. (2007, July 9). Embattled chancellor resigns at Fayetteville State U. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.chronicle.com/article/Embattled-Chancellor-Resigns/39193>
- Fairfax, C. N. (Ed.). (2005). *Black America series: Hampton Virginia*. Arcadia Publishing: Charleston, pp. 25-45.
- Fenwick, T., & Hutton, S. (2000). "Women crafting new work: The learning of women entrepreneurs," Adult Education Research Conference. Retrieved from <http://newprairiepress.org/aerc/2000/papers/23>

- Gasman, M. (2007). Swept under the rug? A historiography of gender and black colleges. *American Educational Research Journal*, 44(4), 760-805. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.jproxy.lib.ecu.edu/docview/200385553?accountid=10639>
- Gasman, M. (2009). Historically black colleges and universities in a time of economic crisis. *Academe*, 95(6), 26-28. Retrieved from <http://www.aaup.org/article/historically-black-colleges-and-universities-time-economic-crisis#.VIJIPXarTIW>
- Gasman, M. (2010). Comprehensive funding approaches for historically black colleges and universities. University of Pennsylvania Graduate School of Education and North Carolina Central University. Retrieved from [http://repository.upenn.edu/gse\\_pubs/331](http://repository.upenn.edu/gse_pubs/331)
- Gasman, M. (2011). Perceptions of black college presidents: Sorting through stereotypes and reality to gain a complex picture. *American Educational Research Journal*, 48(4), 836-870.
- Gasman, M. (2012). Vacancies in the black-college presidency: What's going on. Retrieved from <http://chronicle.com/blogs/innovations/vacancies-in-the-black-college-presidency-whats-going-on/32204>
- Gasman, M., & Commodore, F. (2014). The state of research on historically Black colleges and universities. *Journal for Multicultural Education*, 8(2), 89-111.
- Gasman, M., & Kimbrough, W. (2010, March 8). Part 1: Answers on historically black colleges and universities. *The New York Times*.
- Hernquist, A. (2009). In Bower, B. L., & Wolverton, M. (2009). *Answering the call: African American women in higher education leadership*. Stylus Publishing, LLC p. 88
- Holmes, S. L. (2008, Fall-Winter). Narrated voices of African American women in academe. *Journal of Thought*, 103-121.

- hooks, b. (1995). *Killing rage ending racism*. New York: Henry Holt and Company, pp. 77-85.
- Howard-Hamilton, M. (2003). Theoretical frameworks for African-American women. *New Directions for Student Services*, 104, 21-25.
- Howard-Hamilton, M., & Patitu, C. L. (2012). Decisions to make (or not) along the career path. *Pathways to Higher Education Administration for African American Women*, 85.
- Jackson, I. (2014). My sister's keeper: Women head the new wave of HBCU leadership. *HBCU Digest*, 1, 9. Retrieved from [https://issuu.com/hbcudigest/docs/hbcu\\_digest\\_august\\_2014\\_-\\_final](https://issuu.com/hbcudigest/docs/hbcu_digest_august_2014_-_final)
- Jackson, J. (2004, Winter). Engaging, retaining, and advancing African-Americans in executive-level positions: A descriptive and trend analysis of academic administrators in higher and postsecondary education. *Journal of Negro Education*, 73(1), 4-20.
- Johnson, C. (2007a, July 22). How it ended for T. J. Bryan. *The Fayetteville Observer*. Retrieved from [http://www.fayobserver.com/news/local/how-it-ended-for-t-j-bryan/article\\_271142a2-68b5-5cce-a82d-0ec75473b0be.html](http://www.fayobserver.com/news/local/how-it-ended-for-t-j-bryan/article_271142a2-68b5-5cce-a82d-0ec75473b0be.html)
- Johnson, C. (2007b, December 3) FSU reaches settlement. *Fayetteville Observer*. Retrieved from [http://www.fayobserver.com/news/local/fsu-reaches-settlement/article\\_a30cc79b-8c4f-5f68-9c66-f14738f621ca.html](http://www.fayobserver.com/news/local/fsu-reaches-settlement/article_a30cc79b-8c4f-5f68-9c66-f14738f621ca.html)
- Johnson, Raynor, & Smith. (2008). The Dorothy Cowser Yancy years. Unpublished manuscript. Johnson C. Smith University Archives. Charlotte, North Carolina.



- Jones, T. A. (2013). A phenomenological study of African American women college and university presidents: Their career paths, challenges and barriers. Proquest Dissertation and Thesis Global. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.jproxy.lib.ecu.edu/docview/1318534689?accountid=10639>
- Jones, T. B., Dawkins, L. S., McClinton M. M., & Glover, M. H. (Eds). (2012). *Pathways to higher education administration for African American woman*. Stylus: Sterling, VA. pp. i., 4- 85.
- Kaba, A. (2005, Winter). The gradual shift of wealth and power from African American males to African American females. *Journal of African American Studies*, 9(3), 33-44.
- Kimbrough, W. (2014). HBCU presidential leadership crisis: Here's what can be done now. Retrieved from <http://diverseeducation.com/article/62608/>
- Kitwana, B. (2002). *The hip-hop generation: The crisis in African American culture*. New York: Basic Civitas Books.
- Knight, J. L., Hebl, M. R., Foster, J. B., & Mannix, L. M. (2003). Out of role? Out of luck: The influence of race and leadership status on performance appraisals. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies*, 9(3), 85-93.
- Kulich, C., Ryan, M. K., & Haslam, S. A. (2014). The political glass cliff: understanding how seat selection contributes to the underperformance of ethnic minority candidates. *Political Research Quarterly*, 67(1), 84-95.
- Lapan, S. D., Quartaroli, M. T., & Riemer, F. J. (Eds.). (2011). *Qualitative research: An introduction to methods and designs* (Vol. 37). John Wiley & Sons.

- Leclercq, M. (2003, October 26). A tradition of marching -music goes on once again. *The Fayetteville Observer*. Retrieved from [http://www.fayobserver.com/news/local/a-tradition-of-marching-music-goes-on-once-again/article\\_cd214ff5-857e-51c4-aaac-d5cbb165a504.html](http://www.fayobserver.com/news/local/a-tradition-of-marching-music-goes-on-once-again/article_cd214ff5-857e-51c4-aaac-d5cbb165a504.html)
- Lee, J. M., & Keys, S. W. (2013). Impact of parent plus loan changes on historically black colleges and universities. APLU Office of Access and Success publication no. 3000-FS1. Washington, DC: Association of Public and Land-grant Universities. Retrieved from <http://www.aplu.org/library/impact-of-parent-plus-loan-changes-on-historically-black-colleges-and-universities-hbcus-fact-sheet/file>
- Lee, S. (1999, August 18). Looks like next president of St. Aug will be a woman. *News and Observer*.
- Lewis, V. (2011). Faculty participation in institutional decision making at two historically black institutions. *ABNF Journal*, 22(2), 33-40. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.jproxy.lib.ecu.edu/docview/866849816?accountid=10639>
- Lomax, M. (2015). 6 reasons HBCUs are more important than ever. Retrieved from <https://www.uncf.org/blog/entry/6-reasons-hbcus-are-more-important-than-ever>
- Malveuax, J. (2009). The status of African-American women: Shouldering the third burden. In: National Urban League (Ed.), *State of black America: In a black woman's voice*. pp. 75-82.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook*. Thousand Oaks, California.
- Minor, J. T. (2004, Winter). Decision making in historically black colleges and universities: Defining the governance context. *Journal of Negro Education*, 73(1), 40-52.

- Myrick-Harris, C. (2014). Perspectives on exemplary transformational leadership among presidents at historically black colleges and universities. UNCF Institute for Capacity Building.
- Nealy, M. J. (2010). Who is Marybeth Gasman? *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, 27(9), 6. Retrieved from <http://nclive.org/cgi-bin/nclsm?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/527913505?accountid=12713>
- Nettles, M. T., & Perna, L. W. (1997). The African American education data book. Volume I: Higher and Adult Education. Executive Summary. p. 4
- O'Daniel, A. (2012, September 4). So how did Charlotte become a banking center? *Charlotte Business Journal*. Retrieved from [http://www.bizjournals.com/charlotte/blog/bank\\_notes/2012/09/so-how-did-charlotte-become-a-banking.html](http://www.bizjournals.com/charlotte/blog/bank_notes/2012/09/so-how-did-charlotte-become-a-banking.html)
- Ospina, S. M., & Dodge, J. (2005). It's about time: Catching method up to meaning: The usefulness of narrative inquiry in public administration research. *Public Administration Review*, 65(2), 143–157. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3542549>
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. Sage Publications: Thousand Oaks, CA.
- Perlmutter, D. (2008, June 30). Formidable Leader bids JCSU farewell. *The Charlotte Observer*. Retrieved from <http://www.charlotteobserver.com/news/article8990453.html>

- Reynolds, G. (Ed). (2006). U.S. Commission on Civil Rights: The educational effectiveness of historically black colleges and universities.
- Rhodes, D. L. (2003). *The difference" difference" makes: Women and leadership*. Stanford University Press. pp. 1-44
- Roberts, L. (Eds). (2013). A leaders is... Four college presidents on lessons learned, and taught. pp. 32-33.
- Ryan, M., & Haslam, A. (2006). What lies beyond the glass ceiling? The glass cliff and the potential precariousness of women's leadership positions. *Human Resource Management International Digest*, 14(3), 3-5.
- Ryan, M. K., Alexander Haslam, S., & Postmes, T. (2007). Reactions to the glass cliff: Gender differences in the explanations for the precariousness of women's leadership positions. *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, 20(2), 182-197.  
doi:10.1108/09534810710724748
- Haslam, S. A., & Ryan, M. K. (2008). The road to the glass cliff: Differences in the perceived suitability of men and women for leadership positions in succeeding and failing organizations. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 19(5), 530-546.
- Ryan, M. K., & Alexander Haslam, S. (2009). Glass cliffs are not so easily scaled: On the Precariousness of Female CEOs' Positions. *British Journal of Management*, 20(1), 13-16.  
doi:10.1111/j.1467-8551.2008.00598.x
- Kulich, C., Ryan, M. K., & Haslam, S. A. (2014). The political glass cliff: understanding how seat selection contributes to the underperformance of ethnic minority candidates. *Political Research Quarterly*, 67(1), 84-95.
- Seymour, Jr., A. (2008). Political pitfalls for presidents. *Diverse*. pp. 13-15.

- Simmons, T., & Perez, L. (2000, March 3). St. Aug's trimming faculty jobs: Final edition. *News and Observer*. Retrieved from <http://eastcarolina.summon.serialssolutions.com/search?s.q=St. Aug's Trimming Faculty jobs#!>
- Sotello Viernes Turner, C. S. (2007). Pathways to the presidency: Biographical sketches of women of color firsts. *Harvard Educational Review*, 77(1), 1-38.
- Stewart, P. (2013). Crisis management: Leaders reflect on high presidential turnovers at HBCUs. Retrieved from <http://diverseeducation.com/article/50499/>
- Stewart, P. (2014). The rise of the woman president. *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.readperiodicals.com/201403/32312841.html>
- Stoddard, M. (2002, July 4). Food services fights to stay at FSU. *The Fayetteville Observer*. Retrieved from [http://www.fayobserver.com/news/local/food-service-fights-to-stay-at-fsu/article\\_4b3086fb-d890-5483-8c7c-68bf532226dc.html](http://www.fayobserver.com/news/local/food-service-fights-to-stay-at-fsu/article_4b3086fb-d890-5483-8c7c-68bf532226dc.html)
- Strayhorn, T. L., Williams, M. S., Tillman-Kelly, D., & Suddeth, T. (2013). Sex differences in graduate school choice for black HBCU bachelor's degree recipients: A national analysis. *Journal of African American Studies*, 17(2), 174-188.
- Stuart, R. (2012, October 2). HBCUs facing challenges amid efforts to stay financially viable and competitive. *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://diverseissues.com>
- Suber, D. B. (1996). *A descriptive study of the factors identified in the initiation and transition of individuals into a new superintendency*. Virginia Polytechnic and State University, Blacksburg, VA.

- Thelin, J. (2004). *A history of American higher education*. The John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, MD.
- Thomas, S. (2012). Narrative inquiry: Embracing the possibilities. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 12(2), 206-221. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com.jproxy.lib.ecu.edu/docview/1625565492?accountid=10639>
- Thompson, C. (1998) "Historical Origins of Change: Implications for African Americans in Higher Education." In K. Freeman (Ed.), *African American Culture and Heritage in Higher Education Research and Practice*.
- Thrasher, A. (2003a, June 19). 1<sup>st</sup> woman chancellor T. J. Bryan to lead FSU. *The Fayetteville Observer*, A1, A4.
- Thrasher, A. (2003b, December 7). FSU audit help costly. *The Fayetteville Observer*. Retrieved from [http://www.fayobserver.com/news/local/fsu-audit-help-costly/article\\_d5abb0ba-33f9-5ea7-b91b-b02ceb2023ee.html](http://www.fayobserver.com/news/local/fsu-audit-help-costly/article_d5abb0ba-33f9-5ea7-b91b-b02ceb2023ee.html)  
[http://www.fayobserver.com/news/local/fsu-audit-help-costly/article\\_d5abb0ba-33f9-5ea7-b91b-b02ceb2023ee.html](http://www.fayobserver.com/news/local/fsu-audit-help-costly/article_d5abb0ba-33f9-5ea7-b91b-b02ceb2023ee.html)
- Titterton, G. (2013). ACE Brief Calls for Strategic Leadership on Campus Retirement Transitions. Retrieved from <http://www.acenet.edu/news-room/Pages/ACE-Brief-Strategic-Leadership-Campus-Retirement-Transitions.aspx>
- Unknown. (n.d.). About Hampton University – history. Retrieved from [www.hamptonu.edu/about/history.html](http://www.hamptonu.edu/about/history.html)
- Unknown. (2003, August 30). Willa Player, 94, Pioneer Black Educator. Retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/08/30/us/willa-player-94-pioneer-black-educator.html>
- Unknown. (2004). *Fayetteville State University 2003-2004 Annual Report*. Office of University Relations. Retrieved through request of FSU Library Archives. Fayetteville, NC

- Washington, K. (2008). The legacy of two African American women in college administration  
Maxine Buie Mimms and Wintonnette Joye Hardiman: A look back to go forward.  
Oregon State University. pp. 39-51.
- Watson, Y. L., & Gregory, S. T. (2005). *Daring to educate: The legacy of the early Spelman  
College presidents*. Virginia: Stylus Publishing.
- Weathers, S. (2015, May 20). U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan Delivers Pro-HBCU  
Commencement Speech at NCCU. *HBCU Buzz*. Retrieved from  
<https://hbcubuzz.com/2015/05/u-s-secretary-education-arne-duncan-delivers-pro-hbcu-commencement-speech-nccu/>
- Weiss, R. (1994). *Learning from strangers: The art and method of qualitative interview studies*.  
The Free Press: New York, NY.
- Weisbrod, B. A., Ballou, J. P., & Asch, E. D. (2008). Mission and money: Understanding the  
university. Cambridge University Press. pp. 20-50.
- White, T. (2002, June 14). UNC-Fayetteville? *The Fayetteville Observer*. Retrieved from  
[http://www.fayobserver.com/opinion/unc-fayetteville/article\\_f34da42a-dd64-5836-9b5d-d86ab7687dd7.html](http://www.fayobserver.com/opinion/unc-fayetteville/article_f34da42a-dd64-5836-9b5d-d86ab7687dd7.html)
- Williamson, J. A. (2004). "Quacks, quirks, agitators and communists": Private black colleges  
and limits of institutional autonomy. *History of Higher Education Annual*, 23, 49-81.
- Williamson, J. A. (2008). *Radicalizing the ebony tower: Black colleges and the black freedom  
struggle in Mississippi. Reflective History*. Teachers College Press. New York, NY.
- Yates, E. L. (2002, March 14). St. Augustine's College Faces Sanction by Accreditation Board.  
*Diverse Issues in Higher Education*. Retrieved from: <http://diverseeducation.com/article/2018/>

Yates, E. L. (2005, July 2). Right person, right time. *Diverse: Issues in Higher Education*, 22(22), 28-30.

Yin, R. K. (2015). *Qualitative research from start to finish*. Guilford Publications. pp. 200-245.



## APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER



### EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY

#### University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board Office

4N-70 Brody Medical Sciences Building · Mail Stop 682

600 Moyer Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834

Office 252-744-2914 · Fax 252-744-2284 · [www.ecu.edu/irb](http://www.ecu.edu/irb)

Notification of Initial Approval: Expedited

From: Social/Behavioral IRB

To: [Nichole Lewis](#)

CC: [Crystal Chambers](#)

Date: 10/24/2016

Re: [UMCIRB 16-001335](#)

Experiences Black Women who were first to serve at HBCUs

I am pleased to inform you that your Expedited Application was approved. Approval of the study and any consent form(s) is for the period of 10/23/2016 to 10/22/2017. The research study is eligible for review under expedited category # 6, 7. The Chairperson (or designee) deemed this study no more than minimal risk.

Changes to this approved research may not be initiated without UMCIRB review except when necessary to eliminate an apparent immediate hazard to the participant. All unanticipated problems involving risks to participants and others must be promptly reported to the UMCIRB. The investigator must submit a continuing review/closure application to the UMCIRB prior to the date of study expiration. The Investigator must adhere to all reporting requirements for this study.

Approved consent documents with the IRB approval date stamped on the document should be used to consent participants (consent documents with the IRB approval date stamp are found under the Documents tab in the study workspace).

The approval includes the following items:

Name	Description
There are no items to display	
Informed-Consent-Documents-Template-No-More-Than-Minimal-Risk-Lewis Final.pdf	Consent Forms
Interview Protocol FINAL 9112016.pdf	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Lewis- Nichole Proposal - First Black Females to Lead an HBCU.pdf	Study Protocol or Grant Application

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

---

IRB00000705 East Carolina U IRB #1 (Biomedical) IORG0000418

IRB00003781 East Carolina U IRB #2 (Behavioral/SS) IORG0000418

Study.PI Name:

Study.Co-Investigators:

## APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

East Carolina University



### Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Information to consider before taking part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: Exploring the lived experiences of the first females to lead HBCUs: 1994-2014

Principal Investigator: Nichole R. Lewis, EdD student (Person in Charge of this Study) Institution,  
Department or Division: East Carolina University, College of Education Address: 504 Broomsedge Court,  
Raleigh, NC 27610  
Telephone #: 215-888-9638

Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) study issues related to society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems and the human condition. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in research.

#### **Why am I being invited to take part in this research?**

The purpose of this research is to explore your experience as the first woman to serve as the president or university chancellor of a historically black college or university (HBCU). You are being invited to take part in this research because *you were the first woman to be appointed to that position in the school's history, during the period of 1994-2014, and your story can be used by those who are serving in that capacity or who think they may want to be a senior university administrator at an HBCU.* The decision to take part in this research is yours to make. By doing this research, we hope to learn *specifics about certain key points or pivotal moments in your presidency.*

If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be one of 3 people to do so.

#### **Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?**

*As the purpose of the research study is to provide unique insight for aspiring, female university administrators, based on specific periods of your tenure, the research study will include your name and the institution where you served as the first female president or university chancellor. This study will not be widely published but will be accessible through the East Carolina University database, for future, scholarly reference.*

#### **What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?**

You can choose not to participate.

#### **Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?**

The research will be conducted *face to face*. I will need to come to *you in a location that is convenient for you. I plan to conduct 1 face to face interview, but you will need to be available via email or telephone for follow up questions, if possible, 3 times* during the study. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is **3 days** over the next **7 months**.

**What will I be asked to do?**

You will be asked to do the following:

- *Be available for the initial, face to face interview. Please expect this interview to last 90 minutes to 2 hours.*
- *Provide documents for review related to your tenure, that you believe will enhance your story.*

*Title of Study: Exploring the lived experiences of the first females to lead HBCUs: 1994-2014*

- *Review the transcript of our initial interview, and provide written comments or clarification on statements made during that interview.*
- *As the interview will be recorded, the recording will be made available to a transcriptionist of my choosing, and the transcript will be maintained as part of my literature and data collection for the research study.*
- *You may elect to review your transcript, portions thereof, for accuracy. A copy of research results will be provided to you for your review.*

**What might I experience if I take part in the research?**

We don't know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. We don't know if you will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to you but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.

**Will I be paid for taking part in this research?**

We *will not* be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study.

**Will it cost me to take part in this research?**

It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.

**Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?**

ECU and the people and organizations listed below may know that you took part in this research and may see information about you that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your private information to do this research:

- The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your welfare during this research and may need to see research records that identify you.
- In addition to me, as this is part of my requirement for the completion of my educational doctorate degree, my dissertation committee members, Drs. Crystal Chambers, Grant Hayes and Maria Clay – all of ECU, and Dr. Maxine Mimms, President Emeritus of Evergreen State College-Tacoma.

**How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?**

*I will only transfer and save information as it relates to this study on my personal computing devices. The transcription, should it be completed by a service will ensure all privacy and confidences are maintained. The completed printed research, will exist in the dissertation database at ECU, however you will have access to the final version of the research as well.*

**What if I decide I don't want to continue in this research?**

You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop and you will not be criticized. You will not lose any benefits that you normally receive.

**Who should I contact if I have questions?**

The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator at **215-888-9638** weekdays between **3:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m., and between 10:00 a.m. – 7:00 p.m. on the weekend.**

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the Office of Research Integrity & Compliance (ORIC) at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may call the Director of the ORIC, at 252-744-1971

*Title of Study: Exploring the lived experiences of the first females to lead HBCUs: 1994-2014*

**Are there any Conflicts of Interest I should know about?**

There are no known conflicts of interest.

**I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?**

The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

**Participant's Name (PRINT)**

**Signature**

**Date**

**Person Obtaining Informed Consent:** I have conducted the initial informed consent process. I have orally reviewed the contents of the consent document with the person who has signed above, and answered all of the person's questions about the research.

**Person Obtaining Consent (PRINT)**

**Signature**

**Date**

## **APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

### **Primer Questions**

Beginning the dialogue:

1. What was your formal education (institution, degree, major)?
  - i. Were you first generation college educated or continuing generation?
2. What was your longest-held career position prior to accepting the presidency? Was that a leadership position?

**I will provide information I will ask the participants to verify:**

3. The announcement was made about your appointment on \_\_\_\_\_ (ask participant verify date), and you assumed the role as president/chancellor on \_\_\_\_\_ (date verification).

---

### **Interview Protocol (Questions)**

A. Thinking back to the moment you accepted the position, tell me about your experiences as you prepared to take the helm of \_\_\_\_\_ University.

1. (Follow up) Tell me about your milestone/monumental experiences of your time as the president/chancellor of \_\_\_\_\_ (University).

2. What would you say were the pivotal moments in your tenure?

B. Discuss your last 100 days. What was different, or the same about your experience at that point?

C. What else, that you may not have already shared, is a significant lesson you hold on to from your experience as the first black woman to lead that institution?

